Tall fescue is a common lawn grass option available in the Colorado Springs area. Although once marketed as using significantly less water than Kentucky bluegrass, tall fescue uses about the same amount of water. However, it can provide several advantages over bluegrass where a low-maintenance, traditional lawn is desired.

**Benefits**

- Can form roots 3 feet deep if the soil is well-prepared and not compacted. This feature allows tall fescue to exhibit fewer brown spots than Kentucky bluegrass under mild drought stress if there is moisture available in the soil profile.
- Provides a traditional lawn look with dark green color and attractive texture.
- Because it grows as a bunchgrass, it doesn’t invade flower and vegetable beds by spreading over/under edging.
- Few insect and disease problems.
- Good traffic tolerance (but not as good as Kentucky bluegrass)
- Can persist slightly better than Kentucky bluegrass under low maintenance conditions (less water and fertilizer).
- Performs better than Kentucky bluegrass in shady areas, but not as well as fine fescue.

**Water savings**

- Although once marketed as using less water than Kentucky bluegrass, tall fescue actually uses about the same amount of water. Because it can form deeper roots than Kentucky bluegrass (3 feet compared to 12 inches), it can withstand mild drought stress better than Kentucky bluegrass if there is moisture available farther down in the soil. If the subsoil is dry, it will not perform better than Kentucky bluegrass.
- In dry winters, tall fescue should be watered once per month throughout the winter months (November through March) to prevent winterkill.
- In order to water it efficiently, keep tall fescue areas to a reasonable size. Consider planting other types of landscaping, like low water-use plants with drip irrigation, in peripheral areas of your yard.
- Water tall fescue lawns with a highly efficient irrigation system that includes matched precipitation rotating nozzles, sprinkler bodies with check valves, and a rain sensor. Springs Utilities offers rebates on many of these irrigation products.
- Requires regular watering for several weeks after planting while it forms new roots. In other words, you will not save water until the grass has grown a new root system during the first growing season.

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Don’t use if ...

- You’re looking for a grass that saves significantly more water than Kentucky bluegrass. Tall fescue uses about the same amount as Kentucky bluegrass.
- Your yard experiences very heavy foot traffic. Tall fescue will wear down and require overseeding.
- Your soil is compacted. Tall fescue will not provide any benefit in soils that restrict deep rooting.
- You don’t plan to water, mow and fertilize the area regularly. There are other grasses better suited to low maintenance sites.

Considerations

- If the mower blade is dull, the leaves can shred easily. Constant leaf shredding makes a lawn look browner rather than deep green.
- Long-term drought stress will result in bunchy areas or complete death of the grass.
- Grows best on flat areas that receive at least eight hours of sun per day. Does not grow well on slopes or shady sites.
- Not suited to areas that are challenging to water, like areas of a landscape that are narrower than 8 feet across.

Installation

- The best time to seed or install sod tall fescue in the Colorado Springs area is any time from April through September.
- The optimal time to encourage rapid rooting, fewer weeds and less frequent watering is August through Sept. 15.
- For best results, it’s wise to install tall fescue from sod rather than seed. Seeding can have poor results if not done very carefully.
- Seeding projects will have more weeds than installing sod. If you expect weeds will be a problem, sodding the area will require less work.

Learn more: Call 668-8232 or visit us online at csu.org.