



Tall Fescue

Lolium arundinaceum (Schreb.) S.J. Darbyshire
Sold and widely known as *Festuca arundinacea*



Common Names: Tall fescue, Kentucky 31 fescue is a cultivar name. Not all Tall fescue is KY-31.

Native Origin: Europe, introduced into the United States in the early to mid 1800s for turf, forage, soil stabilization, and wildlife food plots.

Description: Erect, tufted cool-season perennial grass 2 to 4 feet in height, green in winter and spring, during which it is the most common green bunchgrass. Dark-green leaves appearing in late winter, usually flowering in spring (infrequently in late summer). It is semi-dormant during heat of summer, with whitish seed-stalks persisting. Growth resumes in fall and continuing into early winter. Stems are moderately stout, un-branched, hair-less with round cross section and one to three swollen light-green nodes widely spaced near the base. Flat and long lanceolate leaves are 4 to 18 inches long and 0.1 to 0.3 inch wide. In spring, greenish white flowers become purplish and form spindle-shaped clusters. Seeds are husked grain, spindle-shaped, and 0.1 to 0.2 inch (3 to 5 mm) long. It reproduces by seed and spreads vegetatively, forming dense, solid stands.

Distinguishing characteristics include: forming extensive colonies and infestations, growing green in late winter, and having long rounded stems with lower swollen nodes and whitish-flared collars at the base of leaves.

Habitat: Tall fescue, a predominant cool-season bunchgrass, is adapted to a wide range of conditions. It grows best on deep, fertile, silty to clayey loam (medium to heavy texture) soils with open sunlight and a balanced supply of moisture (mesic). It invades a variety of habitats including fields, forest margins, roadsides, ditches, railroad tracks, forest openings, savannas and moist, disturbed places.



Distribution: This long-lived, aggressive perennial invades open areas throughout the United States.

Ecological Impacts: While an invasive species on native grasslands, where it is often considered a pest, it is also a valued turf and forage plant in managed pastures. It can invade grassland, savanna and woodland habitats and the edges of some open marsh and fen systems. It is a persistent perennial that can compete strongly with many native species. It spreads mainly through rhizomes and can form extensive colonies that compete with and displace native vegetation. It is frequently infected with an endophytic fungus that can causes illness such as aborted fetuses in livestock and some wild animals. The endophyte fungus is intentionally developed in many cultivars, in particular KY-31 to give staying power under adverse soil and weather conditions. It is also this fungus that helps make the endophyte containing cultivars aggressive. Endophyte-free varieties are much less invasive.

Control and Management:

- **Manual-** This species can be controlled by planting competitors, especially legumes. Early spring burning—if repeated—inhibits fescue and encourages native warm-season grasses.
- **Chemical-** On forest lands, apply a glyphosate herbicide as a 0.5-percent solution in water or imazapyr as a 1-percent solution in spring. On noncroplands apply imazapic 10 to 12 dry ounces per 20 gal. mix (consult the label for additives) per acre in spring. Follow label directions and state requirements.

References: www.plants.usda.gov, www.invasive.org/browse/subject.cfm?sub=3037, ELEMENT STEWARDSHIP ABSTRACT- <http://tncweeds.ucdavis.edu/esadocs/documnts/festaru.html>, Nonnative Invasive Plants of Southern Forests, p. 48-49, www.invasive.org/eastern/srs/TF.html