



Fescues getting favorable environmental attention

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LM Direct!



STORRS, CT — An ambitious program investigating the potential for turf-type tall fescues and fine-leaf fescues to play a greater role in preserving water quality and also conserving water is getting high marks in Connecticut.



Dr. Karl Guillard, University of Connecticut, at one of the four fescue test sites. Guillard says fescues are important as the industry moves toward sustainability. (Image by Larry Kassell)

In fact, what researchers are learning about these two species in regards to producing acceptable-quality lawns and parks with less irrigation and fewer nutrient inputs (at least compared to other popular cool-season grasses) is starting to attract favorable attention from state and regional environmental agencies.

The name of the program is [Fescue to the Rescue](#). While the name is admittedly a bit over the top, the research has been solid. . . and heartening.

Dr. Karl Guillard, Professor of Agronomy at the University of Connecticut, is one of the researchers involved in the project, which is aimed at providing science-based information to homeowners and professional turfgrass managers about lower-maintenance fescue lawns. “The goal

of the program is to show how fescues can be used to produce acceptable lawns and other turfgrass areas with less inputs, such as irrigation and nutrients,” says Guillard. “In terms of water, the goal is twofold – to conserve water and to reduce nutrient runoff and leaching, which will help to protect the state’s valuable water resources,” he explains.

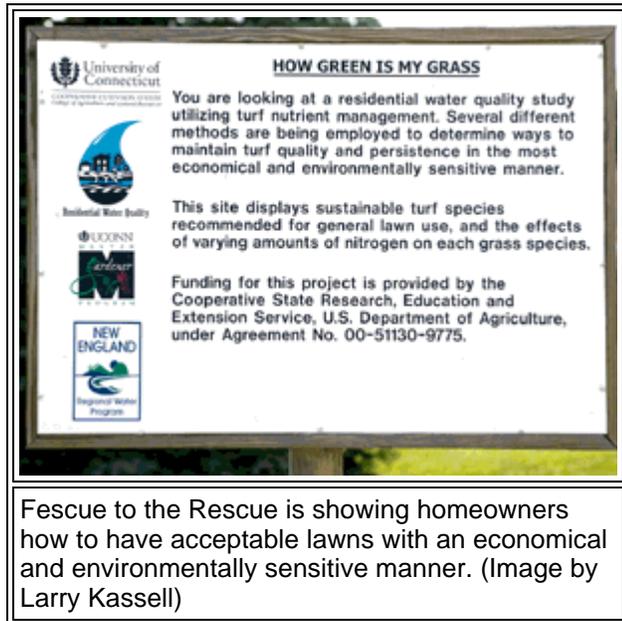
University of Connecticut’s Cooperative Extension personnel are providing this outreach.

Tall fescue, a bunch-type, cool-season grass, burst upon the turfgrass scene about 30 years ago when breeders began developing lower-growing varieties that possessed finer leaf blades and darker green color than previous varieties that had been used as forage in production agriculture or considered weed grasses by homeowners. These new varieties are referred to as turf-type tall fescues. Within the past 25 to 30 years, turf-type tall fescues (and varieties of a related species, fine-leaf fescues) have become popular lawn grasses from the mid-south northward.

The Fescue to the Rescue program is demonstrating that, in comparison to other popular cool-season turfgrasses such as Kentucky bluegrass and perennial ryegrass, fescues:

- are more drought tolerant and require less frequent watering
- are more tolerant to shade
- require less fertilizer
- are tolerant to low soil pH
- maintain greenness during the summer
- maintain quality at higher mower levels
- have high salt tolerance

To date, researchers have been monitoring the performance of fescues (tall fescue and fine-leaf fescue) at four different test sites in the state. Additional sites are being planned for this year.



Fescue to the Rescue is showing homeowners how to have acceptable lawns with an economical and environmentally sensitive manner. (Image by Larry Kassell)

The program is being supported by the Oregon Tall Fescue Commission and the Oregon Fine Fescue Commission, as well as the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection.