



LAWN SEED GRASSES

– their properties and benefits

There are four main species commonly used in domestic lawn seed mixes. They are; Lolium, Festuca, Agrostis and Poa. Within these species there are many varieties that exhibit a range of different properties. For a variety to be recognised it must have distinct, uniform properties that are stable. For commercial use it must also be able to produce good quantities of seed. Commercial lawn seed growers are constantly producing new cultivars to improve properties like drought tolerance, colour, leaf fineness, rate of re-growth etc. The properties of available named cultivars are tested and listed by the Sports Turf Research Institute (STRI). By selecting cultivars with different properties, appropriate mixes can be produced to suit the type of lawn wanted (e.g. fine or hardwearing) or the conditions where it will be grown (e.g. shady or dry). Generally the best lawns are produced from a mix of different cultivars rather than just one.

Perennial Rye Grass (Lolium Perennial)

Rye grass has been cultivated in Britain for 100s of years. Over this time numerous strains have been selected, ranging from short-lived stemmy types to very persistent leafy types, all derive from old pastures or grass lands. Rye is the most important turf species in temperate climates. It is fast to germinate, quick to establish, has excellent wear tolerance and forms a dense lawn. It requires regular feeding, watering, cutting and good light levels to thrive. Modern turf rye grasses have been bred for specific properties, the main ones being compactness, fine leaves and clean cut (i.e. no white or brown top). The leaves are dark green, hairless and smooth. The back is glossy while the upper surface is dull and slightly ribbed. It has a tufted growing habit and is deeply rooted but does not tolerate drought conditions.

Approximate number of seeds per gram = 500. In ideal conditions germination is very quick at 4 to 10 days.

Fescues (Festuca Species)

Fescues are the other major grass type used for lawns. They are naturally wide spread in the British Isles and can be found from sea level to over 1200m above sea level. They grow in diverse habitats ranging from heaths and moorlands to hills and open woodland. Soil can be sandy, gravelly, peaty, dry or damp making them extremely adaptable. There are a wide number of cultivated species that exhibit different characteristics. The most commonly used ones are listed below.

Chewings Fescue
Tall Fescue

Strong Creeping Red Fescue
Hard Fescue

Slender Creeping Red Fescue
Fine Leaved Sheeps Fescue



Chewings and Strong Creeping Red Fescue are the two most commonly used for domestic lawns.

Chewings fescue is a dense tufted perennial grass. Its roots do not have rhizomes and its leaves are slightly bent, dark green, hairless and slightly pointed. They are tightly folded and bristle like, tolerating very close mowing. Chewings Fescues exhibit good disease and drought resistance and maintain good colour in winter and summer. Approximate number of seeds per gram = 1000. In ideal conditions germination is usually 10 to 12 days.

Strong Creeping Red Fescues have creeping rhizomes, as the name suggests. The leaves are fine, tightly folded and bristle-like. Its creeping habit enables it to fill gaps in lawns over time. It is, however, less tolerant of frequent mowing and heavy wear. The average number of seeds per gram = 1000. In ideal conditions germination is usually 10 to 12 days.

The remaining two species are less commonly used but have some very specific and useful properties. Browntop Bent (*Agrostis*) is included in our Showpiece and Shady mixes. It is has soft, hairless, fine, pointed, leaves that are bright green to grey-green in colour. The upper surface is ribbed. It has a tufted habit with spreading, short rhizomes and will establish in a wide range of conditions. It will tolerate very low, frequent mowing and dry acidic soil. The number of seeds included in our mixes is higher than it might appear from the percentages shown because these are expressed by weight and the seeds are very small. Approximate numbers of seeds per gram = 10 000. In ideal conditions germination is usually 12 to 14 days.

Smooth Stalked Meadow Grass (*Poa*) is only found in our Shady mix. It is included for its drought tolerance as its natural habitat is well drained sandy soils. It forms loose, compact tufts of blue to grey-green leaves. It has a dull surface with no ribbing. It has good wear tolerance but will not stand close mowing. The average number of seeds per gram = 4000. Germination is slow at 14 to 21 days, it also requires warm soil conditions.

Lawn seed regulations

Lawn seed is controlled under EC regulations as a 'fodder plant' even when sold for use as an ornamental lawn. For this reason it is 0% rated for VAT and subject to a number of quality and packaging regulations. Pre-packaged seed must have a content declaration on the back stating the cultivars included. Germination and purity must meet the minimum levels set by the EC. Only certified seed that meets these minimums can be sold in the UK. Seed can be sold loose from bulk bags up to a maximum of 7kg in any one bag or container. The seed must be weighed out in the presence of the customer from the bulk container where the contents of the mix must be in close proximity and clearly visible.