

NEW TURF SEED BLENDS WORTH THE INVESTMENT

Overseeding in fall can help a tall fescue or Kentucky bluegrass lawn get thicker and healthier. It also can add the characteristics of newer or improved varieties.

But, it also can increase or add to lawn problems. Often the cause for that is nothing more than the seed that homeowners choose to buy and spread.

“The best idea is a commercial turfgrass blend, recommended by a nearby retailer that you know and trust. In Kansas, for example, nurseries and other seed suppliers tend to be very good about keeping up with Kansas State University’s on-going turf trials, they’re also good about watching to see how well various turf varieties are performing in local lawns,” advised Matt Fagerness, turfgrass horticulturist with K-State Research and Extension.

Mass-market seed sacks and boxes always seem like a better bargain.

Their label may state the seed is just right for the regions where it’s being sold.

“But grass seed is another case of ‘You get what you pay for,’” Fagerness warned. “The cheaper the seed, the more likely it is to contain turfgrass varieties that won’t hold up under central Plains conditions. Cheap seed can also include an amazing amount of weeds and pasture type grasses. In fact, the label’s fine print may indicate this fact with an ingredient list and a category called ‘Other.’”

Local nurseries sometimes offer their own version of cheap seed, too, due to customer demand.

Most often, this cheaper seed is K-31 tall fescue “a grandfather of today’s modern fescues and one that people mistakenly believe is tougher than other turfgrasses,” Fagerness said “Old varieties like K-31 aren’t too different from the fescues that cattle ranchers still plant in pastures. Those varieties aren’t any tougher than the newer turf fescues. But they are more aggressive, so may need more mowing.”

K-31 and other cheap seed often come from outside the nation’s turf-seed producing

areas where growers must meet strict local and industry rules about keeping fields weed- and disease-free. So, their lower price can reflect the lower production costs possible in less regulated, less “clean” areas. Their price also may reflect a savings in shipping. (Much of the nation’s top-quality turf seed comes from the U.S. Northwest.)

“But that kind of seed isn’t cheap in the long run, if you want a nice-looking lawn or if you count the time you spend in mowing as part of your lawn’s cost,” the horticulturist said.

Blends of improved turf-type fescue varieties that are suited to their planting site tend to improve lawn color, texture, evenness and density. Because they come from cleaner fields of origin, they also tend to produce an equal amount of grass at a lower seeding rate than cheaper products require. Plus, their turf is just as heat- and drought-tolerant as an older and taller variety’s grass stand, Fagerness said.