

HARD FESCUE

Festuca trachyphylla (Hack.) Krajina

Plant Symbol = FETR3

Contributed by: USDA NRCS Plant Materials
Program



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Alternate Names

Festuca brevipila Tracey

Uses

Erosion control: Hard fescue's primary use has been for soil protection on road sides, ditchbanks, airports, skid trails in the higher rainfall zones, and as a cover crop in irrigated orchards and windbreaks.

Status

Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status (e.g. threatened or endangered species, state noxious status, and wetland indicator values).

Description

Festuca trachyphylla (Hack.) Krajina, hard fescue, is a medium tall, semi-erect, long-lived, densely tufted bunchgrass. It is a large form of sheep fescue and closely related to Chewings fescue. It has broader, longer, coarser, more lax leaves than sheep fescue. It is more drought tolerant than Chewings fescue but not as hardy as native sheep fescues. It is a heavy root producer. This plus its abundant dense leaves and low crowns makes it an excellent erosion control plant. It is a good seed producer, but seedling vigor is low.

Adaptation and Distribution

The cultivar 'Durar' is adapted to a wide range of soil conditions in areas of 12 inches or more annual precipitation. Performance is best on well-drained soils. It will not tolerate "wet feet" or saline-alkaline soils, but does well on low fertility sites and in shaded areas. It has not been accepted as a companion grass to alfalfa or clover for hay even though it does not reduce hay yields and its massive root system contributes large quantities of organic matter. The dense mass of relatively tough leaves makes mowing difficult.

Hard fescue is distributed throughout the Northeast. For a current distribution map, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Website.

Establishment

A firm, moist, weed-free seedbed is essential. Good emergence and full stands are dependent upon adequate moisture near the soil surface until the root system is established. The seeds are small and should not be planted more than 1/2 inch deep. Drill 5 to 7 pounds of seed per acre. Drilled seedings have been most successful although broadcast seedings at 10 pounds per acre, harrowed or raked in, have worked well on sites too rough to drill. Spring seedings have been consistently more successful than fall seedings. Seeding should be done as early in the spring as possible on drylands.

Management

If irrigated, seedings should be watered every 4 to 7 days until plants are well established. Weeds can be controlled by clipping prior to seed set. Once established, hard fescue acts as an effective barrier to weed invasion. Maintain 2 to 4 inches stubble for soil protection.

Pests and Potential Problems

Grubs, leaf spot, dollar spot, summer patch and red thread are potential problems for hard fescue.

Cultivars, Improved, and Selected Materials (and area of origin)

'Durar' (Oregon) was released by the Pullman, Washington Plant Materials Center. Many other cultivars have been released by government agencies and private turf breeding companies. Seeds can be obtained from commercial seed suppliers.

Prepared By & Species Coordinator:

USDA NRCS Plant Materials Program

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For more information about this and other plants, please contact your local NRCS field office or Conservation District, and visit the PLANTS Web site <<http://plants.usda.gov>> or the Plant Materials Program Web site <<http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov>>

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