



New Grass Blend Conserves Water

By Tom Krupicka

Four years ago, a new blend of grass seed was introduced to the public. It claimed to be tougher, more disease resistant and required up to 75 percent less water during hot, dry summers than its perennial ryegrass cousins. The Water Warden™ blend, consisting of Starfire Tall Fescue, Southern Comfort Tall Fescue and Corgi Tall Fescue has fulfilled its promise.

During the hot summer months the dwarf tall fescue Water Warden blend may require 1 inch of water each month to keep it green, whereas perennial ryegrass lawns require about 1 inch of irrigation or rainfall once per week to stay green.

Another benefit of the Water Warden varieties is that they are well adapted to grow in either full sun, partial sun, partially shaded and even heavily shaded areas. Water Warden is ideal for over seeding after thatching and is also excellent for a new lawn. Seeding recommendations for the Water Warden tall fescue blends are 9-10 lbs. per 1000 square-feet for new lawns and 4-5 lbs. per 1000 square-feet for over seeding. Water Warden is also available in role out ready turf.

Once the Water Warden blend has been established, its roots grow deeper into the earth which allows it to gather water from a larger, deeper range, reducing the need for as much irrigation or rainfall to keep the turf green.

Varieties used in Water Warden

Starfire is a new generation of tall fescue bred for improved overall turf performance with an emphasis on its spring green color, genetic and winter color. Year round, it provides a dense, dark green turf. At the 2002 National Turfgrass Evaluation Program in Mead, Neb., Starfire ranked in the top 15 percent of 125 entries in traffic tests.

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Starfire has reduced its vertical growth, improved its resistance to brown patch, leaf spot, pythium blight, is dark green in color, and is endophyte enhanced (a grass' own immune system which helps the grass fight off insects and diseases and will reduce the need for herbicides to control unwanted weeds and weedy grasses).

Southern Comfort is a new tall fescue variety with numerous improvements. Due to its natural dark green color year round, Southern Comfort continues to exude splendor with substantially less fertilizer. Southern Comfort forms a dense lawn that helps crowd out unwanted weeds and unsightly grasses and has excellent heat and shade while remaining drought tolerant.

Corgi is an outstanding modern tall fescue variety. It has the lowest plant height of any new commercial variety ever measured at the DLF International Seed Research station (DLF International Seeds' based out of Halsey, Ore. Its producers make up over 21 percent of the global grass seed market). Corgi's unique growth habits give it high turf density, fine leaf texture and reduced growth. Unlike many other dwarf tall fescues, Corgi has the ability to perform in areas where brown patch and other diseases are prevalent. Corgi is also endophyte enhanced.

Water Warden past, present and future

Just a few years ago, 100 percent of lawn seed sales consisted of perennial rye and hard fescue blends. Today over 90 percent of grass seed sales are of the Water Warden tall fescue blend.

Now dubbed "the water conservation grass," the Water Warden grass blend positively impacts the environment and reduces the demand for water. Outside of Oregon, Water Warden is currently distributed in very dry areas within the U.S. like Texas, Arizona, Nevada and outside the U.S. as far away as Turkey.

Because of our longer, hotter summer months and rising local water rates, Oregonians need an alternative to standard perennial rye blends. If you want to save water, time, effort and money, I recommend installing a Water Warden blend for best results.

About the author

Tom, wife Annette and daughters Samantha and Melissa have owned and operated Tom's Garden Center in Albany, Oregon for the past 19 years. Tom has been involved in the nursery industry as a grower/wholesaler, landscaper, and nursery owner for more than 25 years.

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