

Tall Fescue



April

T. Bodner



May

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January



July

GRASSES

Lolium arundinaceum (Schreb.) S.J. Darbyshire **LOAR10**

Synonyms: *Festuca arundinacea* Schreb., *F. elatior* L., meadow fescue, Kentucky 31 fescue, *Schedonorus phoenix* (Scop.) Holub

Plant. Erect, tufted cool-season perennial grass 2 to 4 feet (60 to 120 cm) in height, green in winter and spring, during which it is the most common green bunchgrass. Dark-green leaves appearing in late winter, usually flowering in spring (infrequently in late summer). Semidormant during heat of summer, with whitish seedstalks persisting. Growth resuming in fall and continuing into early winter.

Stem. Moderately stout, unbranched, hairless with round cross section and one to three swollen light-green nodes widely spaced near the base.

Leaves. Mostly basal and a few alternate, flat and long-lanceolate, 4 to 18 inches (10 to 45 cm) long and 0.1 to 0.3 inch (3 to 8 mm) wide. Whitish to yellow-green flared collars, with collar backs often at an angle to the stem. Blades smooth to rough, with one to two leaves along the stem becoming smaller upward. Midvein not apparent. Ligule a tiny white membrane.

Flowers. March to June (to October). Loosely branched terminal panicles, 4 to 12 inches (10 to 30 cm) long, that are erect or nodding at tips, narrow then spreading in spring, and then narrow again in summer. Spindle-shaped clusters along branches. Branches shorter upward, with four to seven flowers per branch. Flowers greenish white and shiny becoming purplish. Spikelets hairless, ellipsoid with a pointed tip.

Seeds. May (to November). Husked grain, spindle-shaped, 0.1 to 0.2 inch (3 to 5 mm) long. Whitish straw-colored husks, usually tipped with a short hair.

Ecology. The predominant cool-season bunchgrass. Occurs as tufted clumps or small to extensive colonies along forest margins and right-of-ways, and widely escaped to invade new forest plantations, roads, openings, and high-elevation balds. Grows on wet to dry sites. Spreads by expanding rootcrowns and less by seeds. Replaces warm season grassland communities and prairies to the detriment of unique plants and birds. Certain varieties poisonous to livestock and wildlife by infecting them with an endophytic fungus.

Resembles other grasses, especially other fescues and ryegrasses (*Lolium* spp.) but distinguished by forming extensive colonies and infestations, growing green in late winter, and having long rounded stems with lower swollen nodes and whitish-flared collars at the base of leaves. Ryegrasses distinguished by producing alternate seed heads on opposite sides of seedstalks in spring.

History and use. Introduced from Europe in the early to mid-1800s. Recognized as a valuable forage grass in 1930s when the ecotype Kentucky 31 was discovered. Now widely distributed most everywhere in the World. Established widely for turf, forage, soil stabilization, and wildlife food plots.

States with suspected infestations are shown in gray.

**Tall Fescue****4051**