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Clip tall fescue seedhead in early June

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Clip tall fescue seedhead in early June

Abstract

Tall fescue (*Festuca arundinacea* Schreb.) is a perennial forage grass that is now found growing in much of the southern half of Iowa. Its introduction was primarily for forage but is now also commonly used in turf, athletic fields, and soil erosion management applications. Tall fescue has a lot of favorable traits. It is persistent, adapted to a variety of soil conditions, is compatible in mixtures with other grasses and legumes, can be harvested as hay or grazed, and has a March through early November growing season, making it the grass of choice for use in "stockpiled" or "fall-saved" forage for winter grazing pastures.

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Crop Production

Clip tall fescue seedhead in early June

by Stephen K. Barnhart, Department of Agronomy

Tall fescue (*Festuca arundinacea* Schreb.) is a perennial forage grass that is now found growing in much of the southern half of Iowa. Its introduction was primarily for forage but is now also commonly used in turf, athletic fields, and soil erosion management applications.

Tall fescue has a lot of favorable traits. It is persistent, adapted to a variety of soil conditions, is compatible in mixtures with other grasses and legumes, can be harvested as hay or grazed, and has a March through early November growing season, making it the grass of choice for use in “stockpiled” or “fall-saved” forage for winter grazing pastures.

Unfortunately, much of the tall fescue growing in Iowa contains an internal fungus called an endophyte that produces alkaloids that can cause physiological problems in animals eating the forage.



Cool-season forage grasses, including tall fescue, produce only one set of seedstems with their spring growth. Clip them in late May or early June.



Tall fescue is best identified by stiff, dark green leaves, with deeply grooved upper leaf surfaces and shiny, smooth lower leaf surfaces. Edges of the leaf blades have fine, sharp barbs (serrated). (Stephen K. Barnhart)

The fungus is present in stems, seedheads, and the leaf sheath that wraps the stem. Alkaloids are found throughout the plant but in lower concentration in leaf blades and highest in the stems, seedheads, and seed. The presence of the endophyte is actually a benefit to

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the plant. Some of the alkaloids contribute to the plant's stress tolerance, vigor, and ability to resist diseases and insects. The undesirable alkaloid(s), including the ergovaline type, function as blood vessel restrictors in the animal and can be detrimental to livestock production and reproduction.

A first step in managing the tall fescue endophyte is to clip seedheads in early June to prevent animal ingestion of the plant parts with the highest concentration of alkaloids. Clipping seedheads is also the first step in a more comprehensive stand eradication and renovation. Additional intermediary fescue management steps are to introduce legumes into the stand and move

livestock to nonfescue fields during the hottest summer months. Testing for the presence of the endophyte in existing stands is also a useful management practice that can indicate what percentage of the fescue plants in the pasture are infected and what further management steps may be needed. Mid- to late summer is the best time to test for the fescue endophyte. Extension crop and livestock specialists should be able to help you find a fescue endophyte testing lab.

Stephen K. Barnhart is a professor of agronomy with extension, teaching, and research responsibilities in forage production and management.



Announcements

Asian soybean rust: Focus of Certified Crop Adviser training

by **Jim Fawcett, Iowa State University Extension**

Training for Certified Crop Advisers (CCAs) will be offered at the Southeast Iowa Research Farm near Crawfordsville on June 23, 2005. The training will focus on identifying foliar soybean diseases, including Asian soybean rust. Registration begins at 9 a.m. and training follows from 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. A meal will be provided as part of the \$50 registration fee. Participants who want to become soybean rust First Detectors need to arrive by 9 a.m. for an introduction to the Fast Track First Detector program. If participants also stay for the afternoon tour, a total of 5 credit hours can be obtained. Topics covered in the morning training will give CCA credits of 1 hour in soil and water management and 2 hours in pest management.

The morning session will include hands-on training by Alison Robertson and X. B. Yang, ISU Extension plant pathologists, on identifying Asian soybean rust and look-alike diseases that are common in Iowa soybean fields. Also during the morning CCA program, Bruce Trautman and Mark La Van, Natural Resources Conservation Service, will present information on recent soil and water conservation programs in Iowa.

“Asian Soybean Rust Outlook” by X. B. Yang and Alison Robertson will be featured during the afternoon tour. Other stops will include information on tile drainage on southeast Iowa soils, vertical tillage study results, and soybean aphids.

The registration fee can be paid at the door, but you need to register by June 21 to avoid a \$20 late fee. To register, please contact the Johnson County Extension office at 319-337-2145 or e-mail fawcett@iastate.edu.

To reach the farm, follow U.S. Highway 218 for 1¾ miles south of Crawfordsville, then 2 miles east on county road G-62, then ¾ miles north. Signs will be posted to direct you to the farm.

Jim Fawcett is an extension field specialist—crops with field responsibilities for eastern Iowa.