

Invasive Plants in Pennsylvania

Tall Fescue

Schedonorus phoenix (Scop.) Holub



Photo: James Miller & Ted Bodner, Southern Weed Science Society, www.invasive.org

Background:

This grass was introduced from Europe to the U.S. in the late 1800s. It is often grown in pastures for hay. When marketed as the cultivar *Kentucky 31*, it is included in many lawn seed mixes because it easily establishes and is drought resistant.

Range:

Because of its frequent use as forage and in landscaping, tall fescue can be found throughout most of Canada and the U.S.

Description:

This tufted cool-season perennial grass can grow up to four feet tall. It is green during the winter and spring, but goes semi-dormant during the heat of summer. Whitish seed stalks appear at that time and can grow to a height of 12 inches.



Photo: James Miller & Ted Bodner, Southern Weed Science Society, www.invasive.org

Habitat:

Adapted to a variety of conditions, tall fescue grows best on deep, fertile soils with open sunlight. It invades fields, forest edges, roadsides and railroad tracks.



Biology and Spread:

The rhizomes of this species are its primary means of spread, although livestock can spread the seeds through their manure.

Ecological Threat:

As the density of tall fescue increases in a location, the diversity of native species declines. The reasons for this are two-fold: tall fescue forms dense clumps that crowd out other species and it has a natural toxin that inhibits the growth of other plant species. Tall fescue is often intentionally infected with an endophytic fungus to give the plant staying power, but the fungus can cause aborted fetuses in livestock and some wild animals that eat the plant.



Photo: James Miller, USDA Forest Service, www.invasive.org

How to Control this Species:

Planting competitive species, especially legumes, can help to control this species. Early spring prescribed burns, if repeated, will inhibit the growth of tall fescue and encourage the growth of native warm-season grasses.

The use of a 0.5 percent glyphosate solution or a one-percent imazapyr solution during the spring will help to control this species. Be sure to follow the herbicide label and all state requirements.

Native Alternatives:

There are many drought-tolerant native warm season grasses, such as (1) big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*), (2) little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), indiagrass (*Sorghastrum nutans*) and (3) switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*).



Photo: Chris Evans, River to River CWMA,
www.forestryimages.org



Photo: Howard Schwartz, Colorado State U.,
www.forestryimages.org



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References:

USDA Forest Service Weed of the Week factsheet:

http://www.na.fs.fed.us/fhp/invasive_plants/weeds/tall_fescue.pdf

Invasive Exotic Plant Tutorial for Natural Lands Managers:

http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/invasivetutorial/tall_fescue.htm

Center for Invasive Species and Ecosystem Health: <http://www.invasive.org>

For More Information:

To learn more about invasive plants in Pennsylvania and the northeast, here are some useful resources:

DCNR Invasive Species Site:

<http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/conservationscience/invasivespecies/index.htm>

Plant Invaders of Mid-Atlantic Natural Areas, National Park Service:

<http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/pubs/midatlantic/midatlantic.pdf>

Invasive Plants Field and Reference Guide, U.S. Forest Service:

http://na.fs.fed.us/pubs/misc/ip/ip_field_guide.pdf

