

# SELECTION OF GRASSES FOR ATHLETIC FIELDS

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Most poor playing fields in Kentucky are caused by lack of maintenance and/or use discipline, and are seldom the result of poor grass selection. Nevertheless, you always want the best grass for the intended use and site. Unfortunately, there is no PANACEA grass. Consider the following characteristics of the four grass species that can be used for athletic fields. The best varieties within these species can be found at [www.uky.edu/ag/ukturf](http://www.uky.edu/ag/ukturf).

## **BERMUDAGRASS**

- Potential for winterkill in high traffic areas is a major concern.
- Quickstand and Midlawn are the most winter hardy vegetative varieties. Riviera is the most winter hardy seeded variety. Savannah is a seeded variety that germinates quickly, but has less winter hardiness.
- Quickstand and Midlawn must be vegetatively established (sprigged or sodded). See [www.uky.edu/ag/ukturf](http://www.uky.edu/ag/ukturf) for additional cultivars.
- Sprigging will cost \$2,000 - \$5,000 more per field than seeding with bermudagrass or seeding with tall fescue or perennial ryegrass.
- Must use a reel mower for best bermudagrass appearance.
- Must have ability to irrigate entire field during vegetative establishment (about 2 - 3 weeks). After initial establishment, very little irrigation is required. If no irrigation is available, consider seeding a bermuda variety such as Savannah. Because Savannah germinates quickly, it has a better chance of survival when insufficient rainfall occurs.
- If established in late May or early June, you should have excellent quality by September.
- Annual renovation in heavy traffic areas may be necessary.
- Turns brown in October or early November and greens up in April or early May.
- Makes a very resilient and fast turf.
- Very wear tolerant during the summer and early fall growing season but can be severely damaged by late season traffic.
- Spring Dead Spot is the only major disease problem and Quickstand, Midlawn and Riviera are the most winter hardy and SDS resistant varieties.
- When covered during the winter with straw or synthetic covers to protect from winterkill, another \$1500 in annual maintenance cost may be incurred.

## **TALL FESCUE**

- Relatively easy grass to establish and annually renovate.
- Must be seeded in February-March if play is to occur the following September.
- Best renovated annually in heavy traffic areas with perennial ryegrass.
- Becomes a very permanent and wear-tolerant turf if established before heavy play is imposed.
- Can be sodded if quick establishment is necessary, but never use netted sod in high traffic areas. Some tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass blended sod, without netting, may be available.
- Should not be mowed closer than 1.5 to 2.0 inches
- Has little resiliency but has no problem with thatch.

- Susceptible to Brown Patch disease in hot summer.
- A list of current best varieties available at [www.uky.edu/ag/ukturf](http://www.uky.edu/ag/ukturf)

### **PERENNIAL RYEGRASS**

- Most wear-tolerant cool-season grass.
- Fastest establishment from seed.
- Best grass used for renovation of tall fescue fields.
- Tolerates 1.0 to 1.5 inch mowing height.
- Develops little resilience but has no thatch problems.
- Susceptible to Brown Patch disease in hot summer.
- Serious clumping if in thin stand, therefore some annual renovation is required in high traffic areas.
- To prevent serious Brown Patch or drought injury, requires careful irrigation during summer.
- No sod or perennial ryegrass is available.

### **KENTUCKY BLUEGRASS**

- Will not take heavy traffic, especially during hot weather or early fall.
- Can usually be sodded any time of year and used within 4 to 6 weeks after sodding.
- Because of very slow establishment, it seldom is of sufficient quality to use in September if seeded during the previous February or March.
- Must be renovated annually in heavy traffic areas with perennial ryegrass.
- Often has severe white grub problems.
- Should not be mowed closer than 2"
- Has good resiliency