



How to Buy Lawn Seed

Adapted from Publication 430-010

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The purchase of lawn seed is a long-term investment because the seed you buy will have a large bearing on whether you succeed in developing a beautiful lawn that is perennial in nature. It is not possible to evaluate the quality of seed by looking at it. However, information printed on seed packages can help you make a wise choice when buying turfgrass seed.

There are large differences in lawn seed, and it pays to compare. The price you pay for the seed will represent only a small portion of the total cost of planting, fertilizing, mowing, etc. Don't let low cost be the only factor you use when selecting lawn seed. Choose those varieties that have been tested and have proven to be best suited for your area of Virginia.

Description of Turfgrasses

Kentucky bluegrass is a fine-textured grass that is well adapted to Northern Virginia and the mountain areas. There are many varieties, and some perform better than others.

Tall fescue is well adapted throughout Virginia. It has larger leaves than Kentucky bluegrass and is well suited for many different turf situations. Varieties of tall fescue that have been especially developed for turf have recently been released. These varieties are collectively called "turf-type tall fescues", and are generally the best choices for the Richmond area.

Ryegrass is available in two types, perennial and *annual*. Annual (Italian) ryegrass will provide rapid germination and fast growth but will live only 1 year. This, along with poor persistence under adverse conditions, makes annual ryegrass only suitable where a temporary turf is desired. However, there are a number of good perennial ryegrasses available for lawn use. Perennial ryegrass lawns perform best at higher elevations (> 1,000 feet) in Virginia. The best use for the perennial ryegrasses for Virginia is in a mixture with Kentucky bluegrass where the perennial ryegrass component is less than 15% by weight. A pure ryegrass lawn is not recommended.

Before You Buy, Read the Label

Virginia has a seed law that is basically a truthful labeling law. The seed contained in the package is not required to perform according to standards established by law; but the label on the package must include an analysis of the seed contained in the package, to estimate how well it should perform, and to compare its cost-effectiveness with other brands.

Analysis

A typical analysis looks like this on the label:

Kind: Kentucky Bluegrass	Variety: Merion
Pure Seed: 96%	Germination: 85%
Inert Matter: 3%	Date of Test: 11/85
Other Crop Seed: 0.7%	
Weed Seed: 0.3%	Lot # - 1A
Noxious Weeds: 120 Annual Bluegrass per lb.	
John Doe Seed Co., Richmond, VA	

Germination – The percentage of the seed that is viable (live). The date of test should have been within the previous 12 months.

Pure Seed – The percentage (by weight) that is actually seed of the crop tested.

Inert Matter – The percentage (by weight) of chaff, dirt, trash, and anything that is not seed.

Weed Seeds – The percentage (by weight) of all seeds in the sample and the number of noxious weed seeds present. If possible, avoid seed lots with noxious weeds.

Other Crop Seeds – The percentage (by weight) of crop seed other than the crop being tested. For example, in tall fescue, this includes orchardgrass and ryegrass.

Cost Effectiveness

The only thing you really want to pay for is seed that will grow. When considering seed lots of similar quality, compare the amount of Pure Live Seed (PLS) in the package. To determine the amount of PLS, look at the analysis on the label; multiply the germination percentage by the percentage of pure seed.

Example: Germination = 80%
Purity = 90%
 $0.80 \times 0.90 = 0.72$
 $0.72 \times 100 = 72\% \text{ PLS}$

To obtain the cost per pound of PLS, divide the price per pound by the PLS. If the seed costs \$2.25 per lb., then $0.72 / 2.25 = \$3.12$, the actual cost of Pure Live Seed.

Quality

Certified seed is a guarantee from the seller that you will get the kind and variety of lawn seed named on the label. Therefore, buying certified seed is a good practice. If the seed is certified, a blue label will be attached to the seed package.