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**Cool Season Grass For Shaded Areas**

Now is the time to assess areas of the landscape where trees or structures have begun to shade out Bermuda grass. Bermuda is a full-sun grass and as trees mature, it begins to thin out as overhead canopies thicken. The same situation happens when a privacy fence is erected and the lawn no longer has access to full-sun.

Often, calls come into the extension office asking about what can be done to cover bare areas of a lawn. The landscaper has two choices; either establish a shade tolerant grass like fescue or plant a ground cover to fill the void left by too much shading on Bermuda.

Tall fescue is a great grass for these shaded areas, but the drawback is that it has a different texture than Bermuda. Fescue does hold the soil and prevents areas from becoming mud better than any other grass in shaded areas.

A shade tolerant ground cover provides adequate cover but its Achilles heel is that ground covers tend to catch leaf debris during fall leaf drop. However, ground covers are a low maintenance way to tackle the issue of bare dirt under a shade tree.

Homeowners or businesses interested in establishing fescue grass need to begin making plans to secure seed and prepare the soil with proper nutrients. A soil test is preferable to just making a guess at the amounts of phosphorus or potassium needed and nitrogen can easily be figured at one pound of actual nitrogen per each one thousand square feet of lawn.

Choosing between the cultivars of fescue is not too difficult as there are several which are well suited for Canadian County. Crossfire and Rebel II are old standbys and should be seeded at a rate of 7-10 pounds of seed per each one thousand square feet needing to be covered.

Fescue should be planted in mid-September and is sensitive to compaction problems. Therefore, it is best to till the soil 4-6 inches deep to provide an adequate seedbed. Be careful tilling under established trees to avoid damaging tree roots. Always till out away from the tree trunk like it was a wagon wheel and the trunk is the center of the wheel parallel with the main tree roots.

After the initial tilling, use a rake to smooth the area and remove large clods. Broadcast the seed with 1 pound of actual nitrogen per one thousand square feet of lawn. Then, rake or roll the area to get good seed/soil contact for germination.

Lightly water the soil and keep the top half-inch of soil moist for two weeks following seeding. In some cases, it may require watering lightly several times each day.

Landscapers trying to thicken up fescue stands by over seeding, need to rake the area with a pronged, hand cultivator. Enough force needs to be applied to loosen up the top soil surface and remove the dead grass without ripping up good clumps of fescue grass. Once the seedbed is prepared, broadcast seed and fertilizer followed up by rolling to get seed/soil contact. Water just as described for establishment in order to maintain moisture in the top half-inch for at least two weeks.

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