

Georgia 5, A New Tall Fescue For South Georgia

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Tall fescue in south Georgia - surely you're joking! Everyone knows that it won't survive in the hot summers and on the sandy soils of the Coastal Plain. Tall fescue is the grass that covers the hills north of the "gnat line" in our State. As a result, without a dependable cool season perennial grass, south Georgia has a long winter hay feeding season when bahia and bermudagrasses are dormant and unproductive. This winter hay feeding period for beef cows in the Coastal Plain can range up to 120 days and is a major expense for cattle producers, especially if the hay is of low nutritive quality and requires supplemental protein and/or grain.

All of this is about to change as a new tall fescue is available that will survive in the Coastal Plain of Georgia and produce forage during the mild winter season. Georgia 5 tall fescue was developed and released by Joe Bouton and Don Wood at the University of Georgia, Athens; Roger Gates (USDA) and Gary Hill at the Coastal Plain Station, Tifton; and Mike Owsley, Soil Conservation Service at Americus. This variety was developed over a 7-year period from surviving plants of a collection from areas in the eastern USA subjected to water and temperature stress. Since then, Ga 5 has been tested during 8 years for persistence and yield in the Southern Coastal Plain region. It has also been tested under grazing.

Georgia 5 has better survival and yield in the Coastal Plain than any other currently marketed tall fescue variety and is the only one that can be recommended for use in the region. Forage performance trials across the South show that Georgia 5 is adapted to a wide range of conditions and produces excellent forage yields. Georgia 5, like most tall fescue growing in the USA, contains the fungal endophyte (*Acremonium coenophialum*) which lives within the leaves and is not visible. This fungus produces a toxin which can reduce animal performance but it also is beneficial to the tall fescue plant in improving drought tolerance, and tolerance to insects, diseases, and nematodes.

When Georgia 5 was interseeded in bermudagrass or bahiagrass, it persisted under grazing for three years at the Coastal Plain Experiment Station, Tifton. Stands remained stable in bermudagrass but declined somewhat in bahiagrass which is a highly competitive grass. Weight gains of stocker heifers were adequate for maintenance in winter and should be sufficient for reproduction. Some toxicity symptoms were evident but the results indicate that Georgia 5 should be beneficial for winter grazing by beef cows. Dilution of the tall fescue with the warm season grass in late autumn and early spring will offset some of the potential toxicity problems. Additional dilution could be achieved by planting a cool season annual legume such as crimson clover in the pasture. Red clover is another excellent legume to plant with Georgia 5.

Probably the greatest potential use of Georgia 5 is planting it in bermudagrass or bahiagrass sods to furnish winter grazing when the warm season grass is dormant. The tall fescue continues to survive in summer but contributes little forage then, recovering again in autumn when temperatures are cooler. When compared with wintering cattle on hay, Georgia 5 tall fescue furnished cheaper maintenance at Tifton. Because of the endophyte in the grass and reduced daily gain from toxicity, Georgia 5 should not be planted for stocker steers.

Where should Georgia 5 be planted?

It is best suited to flatwoods and upland soils of the Coastal Plain with good moisture holding capacity. Avoid planting on droughty sandy soils as survival may be limited. Georgia 5 offers no advantage over other tall fescue varieties in north Georgia. Planting Georgia 5 into bermudagrass or bahiagrass is an excellent way to provide grazing over much of the year. It can also be planted in pure stands.

Can I buy seed of Georgia 5 this year?

Seed production and marketing rights

were exclusively assigned to Pennington Seed Company. Seed must contain 70% or more live endophyte. Do not hold this seed over for a year as the endophyte level will drop and the grass will **not** have the same characteristics as Georgia 5. Last year, seed supplies of Georgia 5 were short even though 70% of the available seed was allotted to Georgia. This year, seed supplies are more plentiful but there will not likely be enough to meet the demand. Contact your local seed dealer early.

How do I plant and manage Georgia 5 in warm season grass pastures?

(1) Soil test and apply needed phosphorus and potassium as needed at planting. Many old pastures are low in these nutrients and need fertilization.

(2) Plant into closely grazed or mowed bermuda or bahia pastures after growth of the warm season grass has slowed (October 15-December 15 in the Coastal Plain). Good seed-soil contact is essential for moisture to germinate. Tall fescue seed can be drilled directly into the sod with a sodseeding drill or a grain drill using a seeding rate of 25 lbs/acre. However, the best way is to disk the bermuda or bahiagrass sod before planting. A thick bahiagrass sod must be disked before planting to reduce competition. Broadcast seeding can be done if the grass sod is thoroughly disked before planting and then cultipacked after the seed are broadcast. Broadcast seeding without disking will result in a stand failure.

(3) After seedling emergence, apply 30-40 lbs N/acre. A second application of 60 lbs/acre should be made in mid to late winter.

(4) During the establishment year, delay grazing until plants are 6 to 8 inches tall (probably 4 to 5 months). First-year grazing of tall fescue will be much less than in subsequent years. If a clover was planted with the Georgia 5 tall fescue, early grazing may be necessary to reduce competition from the clover.

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TALL FESCUE

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(5) During spring, mow seedheads and graze moderately. Maintain moderate grazing pressure throughout the summer. **Do not allow bermudagrass or bahiagrass to grow up to hay stage during the summer.**

(6) In subsequent years, apply 60 lbs N/acre and P and K as needed (soil test) when growth of tall fescue begins in October, followed by 60 lbs N/acre in early February. To maintain stand and productivity, do not graze from late September through late November. Grazing from late November through April can be continuous.

Establishment and use of pure stands of Georgia 5

Planting will be similar to above except that it will be on a well prepared seedbed. Pure stands will begin growth and furnish grazing earlier than when sodseeded. Summer grazing of pure stands of Georgia 5 is not recommended because animal performance in summer will be low. Summer weeds may accumulate and need to be removed by mowing.

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