

What Kind of Grass Is It?

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Different kinds of grasses may appear to be similar when they lack seedheads. Many people wishing to know the identity of a grass think the task is hopeless and may take a sample to the county extension agent for identification. Often, these grass samples are abundant in some areas of the state but less common in a particular area. One does not have to be a trained taxonomist to correctly identify our common grasses even when they lack seedheads. Each of our common grass species has some individual characteristics which are useful in making the identification. This article will give some simple ways to identify our main grasses and clovers.

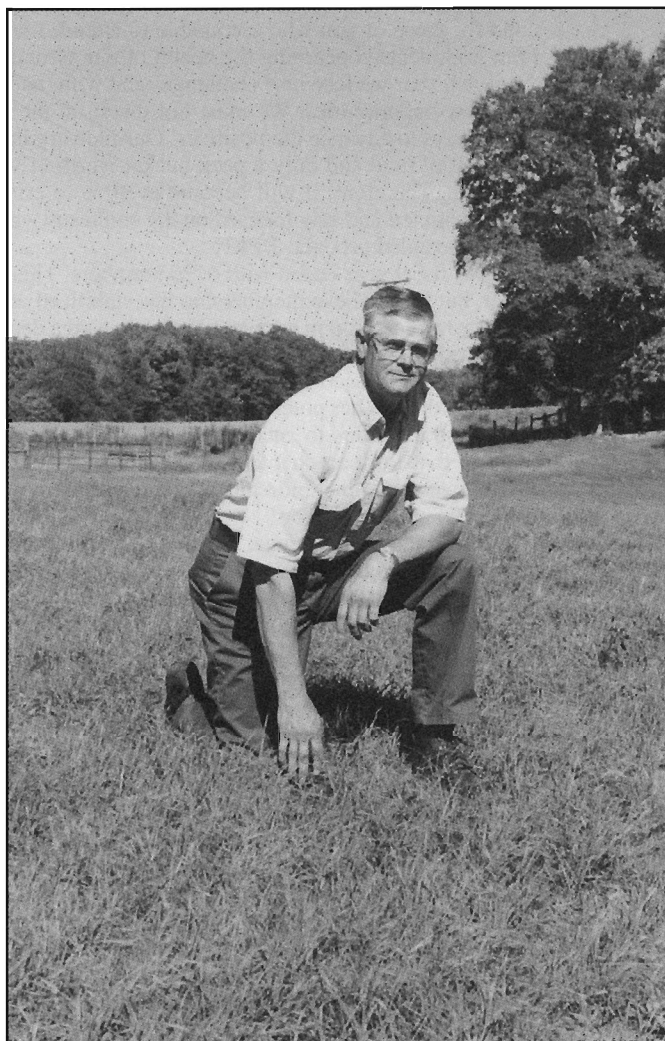
Bermudagrass has both rhizomes (underground horizontal stems that develop new plants) and stolons (aboveground runners that root down and develop new plants). Leaves are flat and narrow (about 1/8 inch wide) with rough edges and form a sharp point. There will be a fringe of hairs where the leaf is attached to the stem.

Bahiagrass has no stolons but has J-shaped rhizomes that are pink at the base. The flat leaves are wider than bermudagrass (1/4 inch or more) and have sparse hairs.

Dallisgrass grows in a bunch and has wide leaves (1/2 inch) with sparse hairs where the leaf is attached to the stem.

Johnsongrass is an upright-growing tall grass with large thick rhizomes. Leaf blades are wide (1/2 inch or more) and have a prominent white midrib.

Crabgrass is a creeping annual with long stolons, sparsely hairy flat leaf blades about 1/4 inch wide, and long hairs at the collar where the leaf blade joins the stem.



There is generally more confusion about the cool season grasses but they too have distinctive features to help identify them.

Tall fescue is a bunchgrass with no rhizomes. The dark green leaf blades have very prominent veins or ribs that one can see and feel. Leaf blade edges are rough and sharply pointed at the end.

Orchardgrass is also a bunchgrass with no rhizomes. Leaf blades are dull blue-green and tend to be V-shaped in cross section.

Kentucky bluegrass is a creeping grass with rhizomes. Leaf blades are long very narrow (generally less than 1/8 inch), dark green, with a boat-shaped tip.

Annual ryegrass is sometimes confused with tall fescue but they are easy

to distinguish. Annual ryegrass leaf blades are very smooth and shiny, with smooth leaf edges and are soft when touched. Where the leaf blade is attached to the stem, ryegrass has narrow, long, claws around the stem while tall fescue has none.

The clovers also have distinctive characteristics that aid in identification even when there is no flowerhead available. The clovers have three leaflets attached at the base but the individual leaflets vary among clover species. Many people can spot white clover but have difficulty identifying red, crimson, and arrowleaf clovers even though they are quite different in appearance.

White clover is a prostrate-growing plant with stolons but no real stems as all the growth is a mass of leaves. Leaflets are oval, non-hairy, and have a white V-mark.

Red clover has no stolons. Leaflets are oval, very hairy, and have a white V-mark. The large round flowerheads are rose-pink to purple, not red as the name of the clover would indicate.

Crimson clover leaflets are oval, very hairy, and have no white V-mark. This annual clover with the brilliant red heads is the one you see along highways in spring and is sometimes incorrectly referred to as "red clover."

Arrowleaf clover leaflets are oval to arrow-shaped, non-hairy, and have a white V-mark. The elongated flowerheads are very large and the color is a mixture of pink and white.

Using these simple keys, you should be able to identify the most important pasture grasses and clovers growing in our state. Among the other species that may be present are rescuegrass, centipedegrass, carpetgrass, broomsedge, hall clover, hop clover, rabbitfoot clover, black medic, bur clover, and hairy vetch.