

## The Right Way to Select Kentucky Bluegrass Varieties

Kentucky bluegrass remains king of the cool season perennial turf grasses. Often it is difficult to choose the right variety because there are so many excellent varieties to choose from for many different purposes. But, there are scientifically sound ways to select the right variety for specific purposes. Having released over 50 commercial varieties and having worked with bluegrasses for over 30 years, I would like to discuss what I consider to be the soundest approaches to selecting varieties.

It first must be understood that Kentucky bluegrass (KBG), in contrast to all other cool season turf grasses, is apomictic. This means that almost every seed (usually over 95%) is an identical copy of the mother plant which means that there is very little genetic diversity within a variety. To get genetic diversity we must blend together compatible but diverse varieties. Blends need to be selected with care.

The second key point to understand about KBG is that most varieties fall into similar groups or classifications. To maximize diversity it is best to blend together similar varieties from different categories. For example, it does little agronomic good for a golf course fairway blend or a sod blend to contain five varieties similar to Midnight. The best approach would be to blend top varieties able to tolerate very low cutting heights from within the Midnight, Compact Elite, America Elite, and Aggressive categories.

As another example, if we want to mix KBG with tall fescue, including an aggressive, fine-leaved KBG or a low growing, elite type variety would be inappropriate. Instead, using 5 - 15% of a broad-bladed, medium dense, less competitive variety from within the Bellevue or Mid-Atlantic categories would be best. These varieties would mix in well with tall fescue and would not dominate the turf within a few years like an Aggressive bluegrass variety would tend to do.

For general turf purposes where cost is an issue and elite turf quality is not needed, a blend using lower cost Bellevue, Mid-Atlantic or even Common type varieties would be appropriate. A similar blend would be useful for lower maintenance purposes, or as a perennial erosion control ground cover.

Attached is a list of PICKSEED varieties, plus a comparison of other similar and widely used KBG varieties grouped by category. This table can be used to make correct variety substitutions when other varieties are specified. Some of the very newest varieties may not be included because they have not yet been classified. By properly using this list to plan your blends and mixes you are giving yourself and your customers the best chance of long term success.



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