

Kentucky Bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*)

DESCRIPTION:

Originally from Europe (not Kentucky), this plant is the primary component of most lawns. Aside from corn, this may now be the most common grass in the eastern United States due to its dominance of our human landscape. This species often escapes cultivation and can be a problematic invasive species in our natural areas. Considerable time and resources are invested into maintaining this species in residential and corporate landscapes. Irrigating lawns uses up to 30% of municipal water supplies; this waste puts our long term supply of clean fresh water at risk. Pesticides, herbicides and petrochemical fertilizers are spread on lawns at ten times the rate they are applied to agricultural lands. As a result, lawns are the primary source of pollution in lakes, streams and groundwater in urban and suburban areas. Exhaust from mowers and trimmers cause up to 33% of air pollution in urban areas. Lastly, these low mown lawns provide no habitat for our native wildlife, and as a result urban development is a leading cause of habitat loss.

-3
Agressive
Weed



IDENTIFICATION:

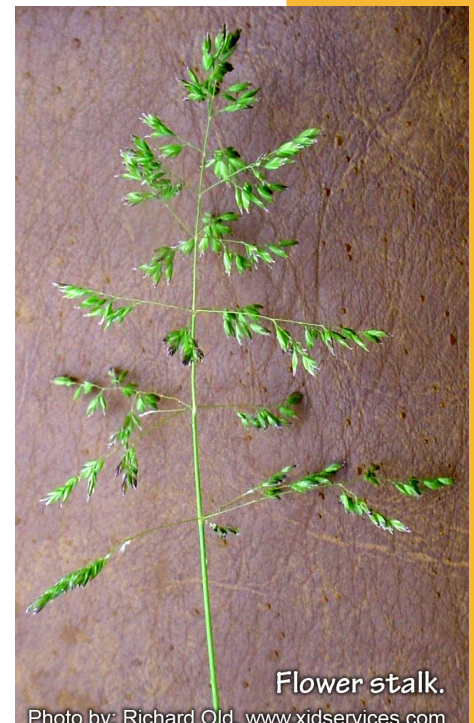
Though most people see this plant just about every day, few people look at it closely. Since there are often other non-native species of grasses in lawns, such as fescue, a few distinct features can help you tell Kentucky bluegrass apart when necessary. When not mown off, the leaf tips look like the front end or “keel” of a boat. Only grasses in the genus *Poa* have this feature. Also, when Kentucky bluegrass is not mown it will develop a distinctive panicle of small, green, wind-pollinated flowers.

CONTROL METHODS:

Organic: Smothering is an effective way to kill lawn and prepare an area for a planting bed. First mow the grass in this area as low as possible. Then lay down newsprint, 6-10 sheets thick, or a single layer of cardboard. If you use newspaper you will need to wet it down in order to prevent it from blowing away while you are working. Lastly, cover the area with 4” - 6” of mulch. Allow 4-8 weeks for the grass underneath to be killed before you begin planting.

Alternately, you can remove the sod itself. For small areas use a flat-bladed shovel, or a manual sod stripper. Renting a power sod stripper will make larger jobs much easier. Once the sod is removed you should plant the area immediately.

Chemical: A foliar application of a glyphosate-based herbicide (Round-Up®, etc.) is the least labor intensive way to kill lawn grasses and does not cause soil disturbance. Then wait 2-4 weeks before begin planting. Always read herbicide labels carefully before use and always apply herbicide according to the product label.



NATIVE ALTERNATIVES:

We recommend replacing lawns with a more diverse and attractive planting of native perennials. Traditional lawns are useful for recreational spaces such as parks and schoolyards. We would like homeowners to consider if they really need to maintain these large expanses of lawn or if they could simply utilize public recreational areas when needed. If you must maintain a small lawn, allow it to go dormant during a drought and understand that a lawn containing both grasses and broadleaf plants is more diverse, healthier and provides more resources for wildlife. Modern push-powered reel mowers are easy to use and eliminate the air pollution generated by gas-powered mowers.

There are a few options available for lawns composed of native plants. Buffalo Grass (*Bouteloua dactyloides*) is native to the Great Plains, and as such is suitable for sunny sites with well drained soil. Once established buffalo grass requires no watering or mowing to stay green all summer, but will turn brown from late fall through early spring. At Good Oak, we are experimenting with “sedge lawns” composed of grass-like natives such as Pennsylvania sedge (*Carex pennsylvanica*), rosy sedge (*Carex rosea*) and ivory sedge (*Carex eburnea*).