



Water Saver[®] Sod

The Only Sod You'll Ever Need[®]

51 years experience sold on RTF - Fallon, Nevada

Jerry Llamas, Landscape Specialist for the city of Fallon, Nevada had this to say about RTF... "In the future the city will only plant RTF in their lawn areas."

Llamas had RTF sod installed on their baseball diamond that took the abuse of three games per weeknight and six games on the weekend throughout the baseball season. Both the city and Llamas are completely sold on RTF. In addition to the regular games that took place, the park also hosted the regional playoffs.

The cities next project is city hall and they feel RTF will be perfect to not only withstand the heavy traffic areas, but to keep its trademark gorgeous appearance. Llamas is always quick to comment on the quality of the RTF sod.

200 soccer games in 3 days on RTF sod fields - Boise, Idaho

Nearly 200 National Cup III regional games were played at the Boise Capitals Soccer Complex in Meridian, Idaho. The regional drew teams from California, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington and Canada.

Coaches and parents raved about the field conditions. The tournament was played over the Fourth of July weekend.

"The surface at the Boise National Cup III Regional Tournament was outstanding," said Bob Poser of Santa Cruz SC (CA). "Even after three days of play, the fields were still fast, smooth and a joy to play on."

Boys Town has success with RTF - Omaha, Nebraska

Boystown has been using RTF turfgrass for several years with great success. Randy Hassler, Grounds Foreman, Boystown National Headquarters had this to say about RTF... "RTF's overall appearance makes it very appealing around building entrances and we find it is the best choice for athletic fields due to its wear tolerance. From a maintenance standpoint we use less water and chemicals. We would like to use RTF on all of our landscaping projects."

RTF exceeds golf course superintendent's expectations - Louisville, Kentucky

RTF is the most advanced tall fescue blend on the market. DeWayne Diehl was looking for a bunker grass that would tolerate the extremes of the transition zone. The fact that it recovered well from divots and had very little disease activity was an added bonus. Although he was skeptical that one grass could be so versatile, he hasn't been disappointed in his decision.

"RTF has exceeded my expectations by performing well all season long." DeWayne Diehl, Head Superintendent, Owl Creek Country Club, Louisville, Kentucky.

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Something New, In the World of Turf

by Patrice Peltier

What's the newest thing afoot in turfgrass? It's RTF®, Rhizomatous Tall Fescue.

Discovered growing in the wild and patented by the Netherlands-based Barenbrug Group, RTF combines the durability of fescue with a growth habit more akin to bluegrass.

Although traditional tall fescues have long been valued for their drought tolerance and low maintenance, fescues generally grow in clumps. This growth habit typically leaves bare spots — not an attractive quality in a turfgrass. To compensate, for turf, tall fescues are often mixed with other species of grass to help knit the turf together and create an even appearance.

Enter RTF

Like bluegrass, this plant produces rhizomes, underground stems that form a network below the surface. The rhizomes enable this tall fescue to knit together, providing both an even surface and soil-holding erosion control.

Unlike bluegrass, RTF is drought

and heat tolerant, requiring one-third less water, according to Paul Carlson, sales director for Central Sod, the Chicago-area dis-



RTF going in at Toyota Park

tributor for RTF. “It takes less water to establish and less water once established,” Carlson says. “It takes less fertilizer, less pesticides, and it’s a fantastic grass for salt tolerance. It’s just a better mousetrap.”

Central Sod started growing RTF in a big way about five years ago in Maryland for its customers on the southeastern seaboard. Locally, the company established a 10-acre test plot in

Plainfield a few years ago to evaluate how the grass would do our region’s variable summers and winters. “It handled our winters the last two years. That was the big question,” Carlson says. Just to make sure the grass was suitable for northern climates, he visited a Minnesota sod farm growing RTF. That operation reported no cold hardiness problems. He says he was also impressed by how well the Plainfield test plot weathered the 2005 drought.

So, how does RTF perform in the real world? Although installations are limited at this point, it is getting a workout in some very chal-

lenging situations.

Grant Park

For instance, in the Summer of 2006, the Chicago Park District asked Central Sod to replace damaged sod in Grant Park within an eight-day timeframe. “The sod had been trashed by an event, and we had to get the park ready in time for the Chicago Blues Festival,” Carlson recalls.

Since then, the 360,000 square feet of RTF sod has been trod upon by visitors to the Taste of Chicago, Chicago Jazz Festival, Lalapalooza and Venetian Night. “It’s looking pretty tired, but it’s still there,” Carlson noted in August.

Toyota Park

Hawthorne Landscape also used RTF in the summer of 2006 to solve a tough problem at Toyota Park, the new soccer stadium for the Chicago Fire. The steep slope surrounding the Bridgeview stadium was confounding engineers and contractors alike. Fifty feet long with a 25-foot vertical rise, the 2:1 slope was a mass of stone covered with soil.

“There were concerns that the soil placed on the gravel might not adhere,” John Joestgen, Hawthorne’s VP, recalls. Would watering cause the slope to slump? “There was a risk of losing anything you put on that slope,” he says.

The original plan was to cover the slope with sedum planted in modular containers to help hold the soil in place. When that approach turned out to be a budget buster, some thought was even given to delaying that portion of the landscape plan indefinitely, Joestgen says. Soon, concerns about erosion made it clear there was no time to lose in finding an economical, drought-tolerant plant with quick-growing roots to hold the slope’s soil in place.

In fact, Hawthorne’s deadline for completing the project was the All-Star game in early August. That meant whatever was planted would be installed in the grueling July heat. “We talked to several engineers and used our own gut instincts and experience to work out a solution,” Joestgen explains. In the end, they concluded using RTF made sense for

that site — and fit the budget.

Central Sod provided “big rolls” so there would be fewer seams. Crews ran the rolls down the slope so the sod could be anchored at the top. “It stayed in place very well,” Joestgen notes, adding, “It had the benefits of knitted sod like bluegrass, with the drought tolerance of fescue.”

Drought tolerance was essential given the project’s schedule. “The temperature was in the 90s, but we still had a deadline to meet,” Joestgen recalls. “We probably would not have proceeded if we had been using a straight Kentucky bluegrass.” Even under those conditions, RTF showed minimal signs of stress from heat, he reports. “We were very, very pleased with how it held up. We’re putting it under a lot of stress in this situation.”

Aurora Park District

The Aurora Park District is similarly pleased with RTF sod it has used on several smaller projects, according to Dan Anderson, assistant director of Parks and Recreation.

The very first project in 2005 was highly visible. The park district installed RTF around a new bronze sculpture the Aurora Art Commission had commissioned for Mastedon Lake. “I was a little nervous about whether the texture would be too coarse, but it looked fantastic,” Anderson reports. “It blended in with the rye mix we used everywhere else.”

After that success, the park district again selected RTF sod to install as part of a \$750,000 renovation project of the playing fields in Solfsburg Park. RTF was used in parking lot islands that must be watered by tanker trucks.

“They almost never get watered,” Anderson explains. In addition, the park district installed RTF in a high-traffic area between the parking lot and the playground. “It handled all the foot traffic well,” Anderson says.

“It roots very, very fast, and has a nice texture,” Anderson says. “It handled the heat, and handled the dry periods. We only watered it a few times. So far, we’ve been very happy with it.”

In the future, the Aurora Park District may be responsible for maintaining the city’s boulevards, Anderson says. If that’s the case, he says he thinks the park district will want to use RTF in those sites because of its durability and drought tolerance. “If this is something that lowers our maintenance costs, we’re definitely interested,” he adds.

Very interesting

Lowering watering labor costs



RTF Success Stories

for commercial customers is one of the reasons Acres Group is giving RTF a try, according to Jeff Kelly, vice president of construction operations. "If we could limit the amount of water needed at some of these sodded sites, that would be desirable," he says. In addition RTF's salt tolerance makes it appealing for commercial sites that are heavily plowed and salted.

Acres just became aware of RTF this year, according to Kelly. In August, the firm sodded a small medical center with RTF as a trial. He says so far he's impressed with the grass — although when he was interviewed in early September, he felt it was too soon to comment on the turf's establishment and performance.

"RTF has piqued our interest, but we don't want to go full bore until we know more about its long-term performance," Kelly says.

Even Central Sod entered the Midwest RTF market cautiously. For 2006, the company grew 150 acres of it, which was sold out by August. That early success spurred Central Sod to grow on 450 acres for 2007.

RTF is not the right plant for every situation, Carlson admits. "With RTF, you're not going to get that wow factor, that drop-dead velvet look and super soft feel of bluegrass," he says.

Homeowners who want a luxurious lawn may not be won over by it, he says, and yet... "bluegrass takes an awful lot of water," he admits. "This is a concern in light of municipal water restrictions."

For now, Carlson sees the best use of RTF on roadsides, athletic fields, golf courses, parks and commercial sites. It is about 10% more expensive than bluegrass, he says. RTF is also available as seed, which is comparable in price to other seed mixes. "We have found that RTF needs to be slit-seeded not broadcast, and it should not be seeded after October 1," Carlson notes.

With water conservation becoming an increasing concern, a durable, drought-tolerant grass like RTF holds much promise. "I'm sure there's a downside somewhere," Carlson says. "But we're really not seeing it yet."

Discovering a New Grass

In the mid-1980s, Barenbrug, a plant breeding and seed production company based in the Netherlands, put out the word to its eight research stations around the world: keep an eye out for rhizome-forming species of tall fescue. By the early 1990s, the grass that was to become RTF was discovered in a park in southern France, according to Walt Pemrick, a national account manager for Barenbrug.

Plant breeders went to work on the grass, improving its color, disease resistance and rhizome formation. In January 2004, Barenbrug USA received a patent on this improved vari-



RTF 10 days after the Chicago Blues Festival

ety of tall fescue and licensed the RTF® Turf Producers Association as the sole producer and marketer of RTF sod.

Testing RTF

Where's the best place to put something to the test? At a university. For the last three years, Henry Wilkinson, associate professor in the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign's Horticulture Department, has been evaluating RTF® for the RTF Turf Producers Association.

As part of the evaluation, Wilkinson had three types of sod installed in the university's turfgrass research center: bluegrass, traditional fescue and RTF. He observed how RTF performed as sod, how it rooted in, and how it stood up to abuse by special "wear machines."

His findings? "RTF wears quite similar to — and even better than — a lot of bluegrass and certainly better than regular fescues," he says.

Although he did not objectively measure RTF's drought tolerance, he says it "certainly behaves like a fescue with a deep, fibrous root system. I don't know if it uses less water, but it certainly can be watered less frequently because it draws water from a greater soil mass."

As Wilkinson sees it, one of RTF's big advantages is that it grows by rhizomes. This means it can be grown and installed as sod more easily than other fescues. "It gives us the ability to put fescue in the marketplace as sod," he says.

As for quantifying some of RTF's other benefits, Wilkinson says there will be more news in the future, adding, "We're not done studying it yet." 🌿