

TALL FESCUE

LOVE IT OR HATE IT



Tall fescue (*Festuca arundinacea*) is one of the most important cool season grasses. It is widely adapted to the eastern US and is a common component in many pasture mixes. Most tall fescue is infected with a fungal endophyte that increases the plant's tolerance to drought, heat, pests, and grazing pressure. Unfortunately, the endophyte can also cause various problems in grazing animals, including sheep and goats.

The endophyte fungus in tall fescue produces toxins (ergot alkaloids) that can have negative effects on animal performance, including reduced feed intake, decreased weight gain, reduced milk production, and reproductive problems. The best strategy for grazing endophyte-infected tall fescue is dilution with supplementation or other forages.

There are novel varieties of fescue that combine the hardiness of traditional tall fescue with improved animal health benefits. These varieties are specifically bred to contain novel endophytes, which do not produce the harmful toxins found in traditional fescue.

Fescue is one of the best forages for stockpiling for fall and winter grazing. In addition to being nutritious forage, the toxin levels decline in endophyte-infected fescue. Begin stockpiling in late summer for adequate regrowth.

