

Festuca glauca - Blue Fescue or Sheep Fescue (*Poaceae*)

Festuca glauca is a small-sized, early blooming ornamental grass. Blue Fescue is valued for its light blue, fine-textured, semi-evergreen radiating foliage. It is often utilized in edging or group plantings, blending nicely with cool-colored perennials and working well with rockery and stonewalls.

FEATURES

Form

- miniature to small-sized, semi-evergreen ornamental grass
- maturing at 10" tall x 10" wide in foliage (twice as large when in flower or fruit)
- radiating clump growth habit



Culture

- full sun to partial sun
- prefers moist, well-drained soils of rich to average fertility in full sun, but is tolerant of dry soils, poor soils, various soil pHs, heat, drought, and winter salt spray; intolerant of wet soils or poorly drained soils
- propagated primarily by clump division in early spring, but also by seeds
- Grass Family, with essentially no diseases or pests moderately available in containers
- the semi-evergreen foliage needs to be sheared back in early spring to one-third of its previous height to allow the new blue foliage to emerge unhindered from the clump
- if a solid coverage of foliage is desired, Blue Fescue should be planted densely, as it is a clump-former and does not significantly widen from the crown with age

Foliage

- light blue-silver in spring, blue-green in summer, dark green in autumn and slowly turning to green-brown throughout the winter (semi-evergreen in its northern range, but evergreen further south)
- needle-like foliage is up to 10" long, radiating like a blue porcupine

Flowers

- fine-textured, light green inflorescences emerge in June and early July (one of the first small ornamental grasses to bloom)
- young plants may not bloom the first year after transplanting, and even on mature specimens, the

flowering is only moderately ornamental
-the sparse inflorescences are somewhat distracting as they turn into buff-colored fruiting heads, diverting attention from the attractive blue foliage, and can be removed (if so desired) by shearing off the longer fruiting stalks in summer to promote the blue foliage

Fruits

- brown seed heads occur on the fruiting stalks and are marginally ornamental, but may moderately self-sow in unmulched areas to form a colony of the grass

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Function

- specimen, focal point, entranceway, border, edging, group planting or mass planting, facer, raised planter, or embankment small ornamental grass
- blends effectively with cool-colored perennials and works well with rockery and stonewalls

Texture

- ultra-fine texture
- thick density

Assets

- blue foliage
- radiating, fine-textured, needle-like foliage
- short height
- winter salt spray tolerant

Liabilities

- none serious

Habitat

- Zones 5 to 8
- Native to Europe

SELECTIONS

Alternates

- ornamental grasses of low height (*Briza media*, *Carex morrowii* 'Aureo-variegata', *Hakonechloa macra* 'Aureola', *Liriope muscari*, *Liriope spicata*, *Luzula sylvatica*, *Ophiopogon planiscapus* 'Niger', *Pennisetum alopecuroides* 'Little Bunny', *Phalaris arundinacea* 'Picta' [invasive], *Sesleria caerulea*, etc.)
- blue-foliaged ornamental grasses (*Leymus arenarius* [invasive], *Helictotrichon sempervirens*, *Koeleria glauca*, *Panicum virgatum* 'Heavy Metal', *Schizachyrium scoparium* 'Blaze', *Sesleria caerulea*, etc.)

Variants

- 'Elijah Blue' - silvery and sky-blue new foliage in spring, persisting with faded blue-green foliage into autumn; several selections of this cultivar are in the nursery trade, sold under the same name but differing in the intensity and persistence of the blue foliage