

This column features questions from readers submitted via the Website. To submit a question to Small Acre Sam, visit BarnyardsandBackyards.com. If your question is featured, you will receive a free one-year subscription to *Barnyards & Backyards!*



ask Sam

Dear Sam,

I've heard Kentucky bluegrass has been given a bad rap as far as water use is concerned – that perhaps it isn't quite the water hog we've heard it to be compared to other lawn grasses. Is this true? If so, how do I go about deciding what type of grass to plant at my high elevation location if I'd like to have conservative water use?

— Robert, Saratoga

Dear Robert,

To say all Kentucky bluegrasses (*Poa pratensis*) are water hogs is akin to saying all roses are red: it just isn't true. There are hundreds of varieties of Kentucky bluegrass out there, and they vary tremendously in their water requirements. So, yes, I would agree that often Kentucky blue is given the proverbial bad rap. In reality, Kentucky bluegrass is a cool-season grass, preferring

cooler night temperatures, one of the main reasons it does so well in our area. Several varieties of Kentucky bluegrass are lower-maintenance using less water than others. Some low-maintenance bluegrass varieties include Park, Kenblue, and North Dakota Common. A mowing height of about 3 inches is recommended. More thirsty varieties may use up to 2.5 inches of water per week. More water-thrifty bluegrasses, such as those listed above, may use half that.

Other species of grasses that handle high-altitude climates include turf-type tall fescues and fine fescues. The downside to fescues is their fairly poor tolerance of high traffic. They may not wear very well with persistent foot or pet use. Few (maybe none) match the beauty of a highly manicured and intensively managed Kentucky bluegrass lawn, but they might offer characteristics better suited to a homeowner looking for a lower water requirement, lower fertilization, less mowing, and who is willing to give up that postcard look.

There are numerous resources available for determining the best grass to use for high-altitude lawns. Two bulletins are available from the University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service. You can find both on the barnyardsandbackyards.com "Resources – Lawns" Web page. One is *Landscaping: Turf in Wyoming* (<http://www.wyomingextension.org/agpubs/pubs/B1129.pdf>) and the other is *Low-Maintenance Grasses for Revegetating Disturbed Areas and Lawns* (<http://www.wyomingextension.org/agpubs/pubs/B1070.pdf>).

Both provide suggestions for turf-type grasses for the Wyoming climate. Another resource is the information on the Colorado State University turf website at <http://csu-turf.colostate.edu/Pages/homelawncare.htm>.

— Sam

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