



Quality vs. Quantity - How to decipher a seed label.

One of the most common misconceptions made by turf professionals and homeowners alike is the idea of “Seed is Seed, as long as it grows and is green”. This idealism is one that can make or break those managing turf as a profession, and in the long run cost companies unneeded maintenance expenses.

When buying seed, it is extremely important to pay close

attention to the seed label(s). Learning to read a seed tag can help you determine if you are truly receiving value and help you avoid future problems and expense.

- First, it is important to determine if the seed is of a single variety (one name on the label) or is a mixture or blend (two or more names on the label).
- Secondly, note if you are buying an improved, (turf-type) variety such as Bonsai 3000 Tall Fescue or just a common (non turf-type) variety such as Fawn Tall Fescue.
- Some labels will even state “variety not stated” which is an indication of lesser quality. The turf quality of many varieties of grass seed can be referenced through

SEED LABEL IDENTIFICATION

Identifying lot number →

Kind or type and variety name if applicable. →

Indicates if a variety is protected from unauthorized seed production. →

% of other types of seed that are grown as a crop. Should be less than 1.50%. →

Should be less than 0.15%. →

Indicates where the seed was produced. →

Date of germination test(s). →

IMPERIAL BLEND SEED MIXTURE

Lot# IB-12156

KIND	% PURITY	%GERM
Affinity Perennial Ryegrass*	33.95	90
Evening Shade Perennial Ryegrass*	33.95	90
Rugby II Kentucky Bluegrass*	9.70	85
Brooklawn Kentucky Bluegrass*	9.70	85
Creeping Red Fescue	9.70	90

*PVP Protected-Unauthorized Propagation Prohibited

% CROP SEED 1.25	%INERT MATTER 1.65
%WEED SEED 0.10	NO NOXIOUS WEEDS

ORIGIN: OR

TESTED: 6/12

SELL BY: 11/13

STOVER SEED COMPANY, LOS ANGELES, CA 90086

Name of mixture, blend or individual variety. →

% of pure seed of the type in the mixture. →

% Germination of the type in the mixture. →

% Inert matter in the mixture, usually less than 2% unless seed is coated. →

Sell by date is the expiration of the germination test and can vary among states. →

Name of labeler. Must have license to sell seed.

trials conducted by the National Turfgrass Evaluation Program www.NTEP.org.

After confirmation of variety, check for percent purity. Depending upon the number of varieties on the label there may be multiple entries for purity. In any event, these purity numbers should add up to as close to 100 percent as possible.

Total purity of 98 percent or greater is considered excellent quality. A seed lot of less than 98 percent or a seed mixture that adds up to less than 98 percent can be of good quality depending on the percent of weed and crop seed (see below). The germination number represents the percentage of seed that can be expected to germinate and establish.

Good quality seed can be expected to have a germination range of 80 to 90 percent depending upon the type of grass. The germination percentage is determined by a seed laboratory and the test must be conducted within a certain time period, usually within the last 12 to 15 months. This is noted on the tag under "Tested" (date of germination test) and "Sell by" which is the expiration date of the test.

Seed can be retested for germination percentage upon expiration but the seed must be relabeled with the new test results. You should not purchase any seed whose germination has expired beyond the "Sell by" date.

At the bottom of the seed label are three important parts: Crop Seed, Inert Matter and Weed Seed percentages.

"Crop Seed" is the percentage of seed of another crop. For example Ryegrass is considered crop seed if it is found in Tall Fescue and vice versa. There is usually a small percentage of crop seed in most seed lots and it is not of concern unless it gets above 1.50%. In any case your seed dealer can tell you what the crop seed is by reviewing the lab test that lists the type and amount of crop, weed and inert matter in a lot of seed.

"Inert Matter" notes the percentage of inert matter in the mix. Inert is usually parts of the plant that escaped the cleaning process such as chaff, stems or hulls and is usually in the 2 to 5 percent range. However some seeds can be coated or treated and have inert percentages in the 50 to 80 percent range and this is listed on the label. Some lots of seed can also contain a high percentage of inert matter such as dried mulch or other organic matter for use in spreading the seed. Again this is listed on the label and should be factored in computing the actual cost of the seed. If the seed cost \$5.00 a pound but has 50% coating or inert matter then the actual cost of pure seed is about \$10.00/lb ($\$5.00/.50=\10.00).

"Weed Seed" is fairly self-explanatory and should be 0.15% or less. Again, consult the lab test if you have any concerns. Noxious weed seeds are classified as "economically troublesome" and are generally prohibited in a seed mix. The types of noxious weeds vary from state to state and even from county to county. The state agriculture department maintains a list of prohibited noxious weeds within that state and is usually available online. Other information on the label is the name of the labeler or seed company which must hold a valid license to sell seed and the "Origin" of the seed or where it was produced.

While this will serve as a guide to understanding a seed label, keep in mind that a seed dealer's reputation rides on every label that is attached to a package of seed that is sold. Your assurance of the accuracy of the label to what is in the bag rests with the reputation and integrity of the seed dealer.



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