

'Covar' SHEEP FESCUE

Scientific Name: *Festuca ovina L.*

Common Name: Sheep Fescue

Cultivar Name: 'Covar' (PI 109497)

Selected By: Pullman PMC, USDA-NRCS

Release Cooperators: USDA-SCS, Washington State University Agricultural Research Center, Oregon Agricultural Experiment Station, Idaho Agricultural Experiment Station

Release Date: 1977



ORIGIN: 'Covar' was developed from material collected in Konya, Turkey. It was compared to numerous other fescue strains. In one 6-year herbage production study, it produced an average 850 pounds of forage per acre, as much as Idaho Fescue, a native species. Trial plantings in the tri-state (WA, ID, OR) region show 'Covar' is an aggressive competitor that forms an attractive drought-tolerant, erosion-control cover. It is a more desirable groundcover than Sherman big bluegrass, 'Durar' hard fescue, creeping red fescue, and crested wheatgrass in 10-14 inches annual rainfall areas. 'Covar' is somewhat slow to establish. Once established, it is very persistent, winter-hardy, and drought-tolerant. In the Northwest, it is best adapted to all elevations in the 8-25" effective annual precipitation zones.

DESCRIPTION: It is a cool season perennial bunchgrass described as a dwarf type of sheep fescue with blue-green foliage, densely tufted, with abundant, short, stiff, narrow

basal leaves. Panicles are short, seldom more than 3" long and strongly compressed. Spikelets are 3-4 flowered. Glumes are lanceolate and glabrous to scaberulous, mostly short-awned. Lemmas are awn-tipped to awnless.

DISEASE AND INSECT PROBLEMS: 'Covar' is resistant to common turf diseases. No insects have adversely affected it to date.

SEED PRODUCTION: 'Covar' is a prolific seed producer. In 36-inch rows, dryland production at Pullman, Washington, ranged from 300-500 pounds per acre. Seed does not have to be de-awned and is easily cleaned. Seed may be produced under dryland or with irrigation. Adequate isolation is needed from other fescues for certified seed production.

SEEDING RECOMMENDATIONS: 'Covar' may be seeded in the fall (late October to mid-November) or spring. Fall seeding is preferred in the low rainfall areas. Seed not over 3/8 inch deep, on a firm seedbed. It is recommended all plantings be made on a Pure Live Seed basis (PLS). On critical erosion sites, 'Covar' may be seeded in a mixture with slender wheatgrass or crested wheatgrass to provide a quicker ground cover.

CONSERVATION USES: 'Covar' is recommended for controlling soil erosion in areas having an annual rainfall of 10-17 inches. It is well adapted for roadbanks, in terraces or diversions, as dryland turf, in waterways, on steep slopes planned for permanent cover, and other critical areas subject to erosion. It is not intended for livestock grazing although it is palatable.

AVAILABILITY: For additional information contact: Wayne Crowder, Soil Conservationist, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, Pullman Plant Materials Center (509) 335-7376 or email crowder@wsu.edu.