# Identification and Management Strategies for Virginia's Turfgrasses

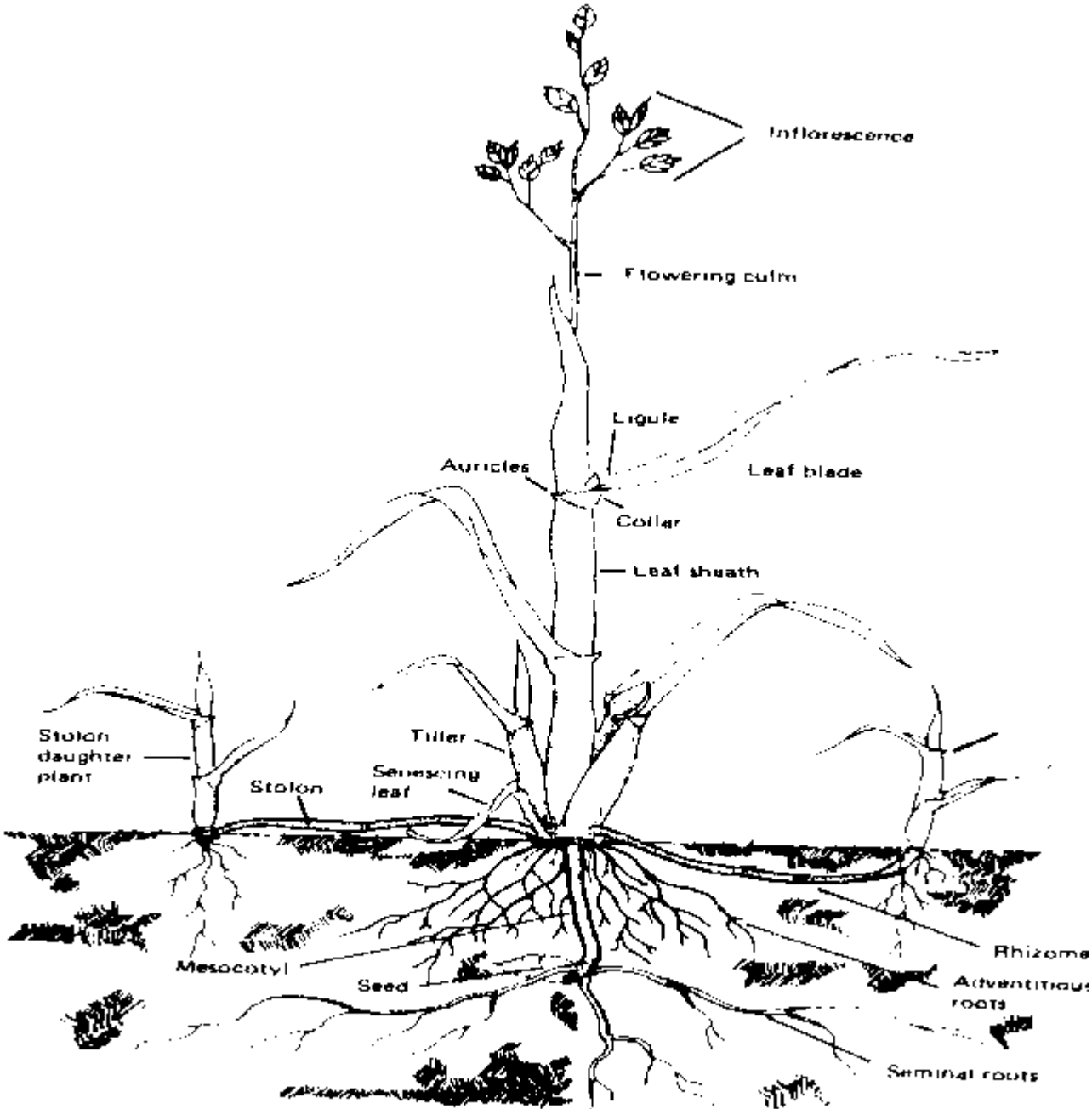
Mike Goatley, Jr.
Extension Turfgrass Specialist
goatley@vt.edu

Urban Nutrient Management Certification Training

# Basic Identification Tips for Turfgrasses

In order to properly develop a nutrient management plan, one needs to know what grasses are being grown.

# The Turfgrass Plant



# TURFGRASS
IDENTIFICATION TOOL

Main Page | Anatomy/Morphology | Turfgrass Identification | List of Turfgrasses

*This diagnostic tool will enable the user to learn the essential features of the turfgrass plant and identify major turfgrass species present in lawns and other turfgrass areas.*

## How to Identify a Turfgrass
Provides a description of the step-wise process commonly used to identify an unknown turfgrass plant.

## Anatomy and Morphology
An overview of the essential parts of the turfgrass plant. After you review this information you will be able to properly locate important features and identify turfgrasses.

## Turfgrass Identification
This section allows you to key out the various turfgrass species using one or more of the features described in the anatomy/morphology section.

## List of Turfgrasses
Provides specific anatomical information in photographs and drawings for all of the major turfgrass species cultivated in the United States.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DEPARTMENT of AGRONOMY

Cale Bigelow
Assistant Professor of Agronomy

DEVELOPERS
Jason Shore, Ivan Delgado
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http://www.agry.purdue.edu/turf/tool/index.html

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CENTERE Center for Turfgrass Environmental Research & Education — TurfFiles

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TURFGRASSES

- Bahiagrass
- Bentgrass, Creeping
- Bermudagrass
- Bluegrass, Kentucky
- Bluegrass, Rough
- Buffalograss
- Carpetgrass
- Centipedegrass
- Fescue, Fine

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# BLUEGRASS, KENTUCKY

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## Bluegrass, Kentucky

[*Poa pratensis* L.]

Kentucky bluegrass is the second most widely grown cool-season species in North Carolina because it has a dark green color, a medium to fine texture, and, due to its aggressive rhizome system, can recover from stresses. It prefers fertile, well-limed soils and full sun to moderate shade. Kentucky bluegrass is often mixed with other cool-season grasses like tall fescue to enhance the ability of the turfgrass stand to recover from stresses. Kentucky bluegrass is often confused with tall fescue and/or perennial ryegrass. However, Kentucky bluegrass has a boat-shaped leaf tip and distinctive light-colored lines on both sides of the midrib.


| Characteristic | Description |
|---|---|
| Seedhead / Flower | seedhead is an open panicle. spikelets are flattened, with 3-5 seeds each. |
| Vernation Type | leaves folded in the bud |
| Ligule Type | membranous; very short, collar-like, 0.008 - 0.04 inches (0.2 - 1 mm) long |
| Growth Season / Life Cycle | cool season turf |
| Auricle Type | absent |
| Leaf Blade Tip Shape | boat shaped; usually V-shaped, sharply creased below; two distinct, clear lines, one on each side of the midrib |
| Leaf Blade Width | 0.08 - 0.16 inches (2 - 4 mm) wide |
| Stolon Presence | absent |
| Rhizome Presence | present |
| Collar Type | slightly divided by midrib, may have fine hair on edge |
| Sheath Margin | closed, but splits with maturity |
| Sheath Type | flattened; not hairy |


Kentucky bluegrass leaf tip

Kentucky bluegrass ligule

Note: Still not sure this is the right turfgrass? The Turf & Weed Identification Decision Aid may help. Check the TurfFiles glossary for definitions of unfamiliar terms.

http://www.turffiles.ncsu.edu/turfgrasses

# TURFGRASS IDENTIFICATION TOOL

Main Page | Anatomy/Morphology | Turfgrass Identification | List of Turfgrasses

Vernation | Ligule | Auricles | Leaf Tip | Leaf Surface | Mid-Rib | Collar | Growth | Seedhead

## Vernation

The arrangement of the youngest leaf in the bud shoot, either rolled or folded.

Rolled

Folded

Rolled/Folded

Please Click on the Image to Select If you are unsure of the exact nature of the feature simply click NEXT.

NEXT

### Current Search Results

| % Match | Turfgrass Common Name |
|---|---|
| | Annual Bluegrass |
| | Annual Ryegrass |
| | Bahiagrass |
| | Bermudagrass |
| | Buffalograss |
| | Carpetgrass |
| | Centipedegrass |
| | Colonial Bentgrass |
| | Creeping Bentgrass |
| | Fine Fescue |
| | Hybrid Bermudagrass |

RESET | VIEW RESULTS


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# TURFGRASS IDENTIFICATION TOOL



## Leaf Tip

The flattened portion of the leaf located above the sheath.

Pointed

Boat - Shaped

Blunt or Rounded

BACK

Please Click on the Image to Select If you are unsure of the exact nature of the feature simply click NEXT.

NEXT

### Current Search Results

| % Match | Turfgrass Common Name |
|---|---|
| | Annual Bluegrass |
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| | Hybrid Bermudagrass |

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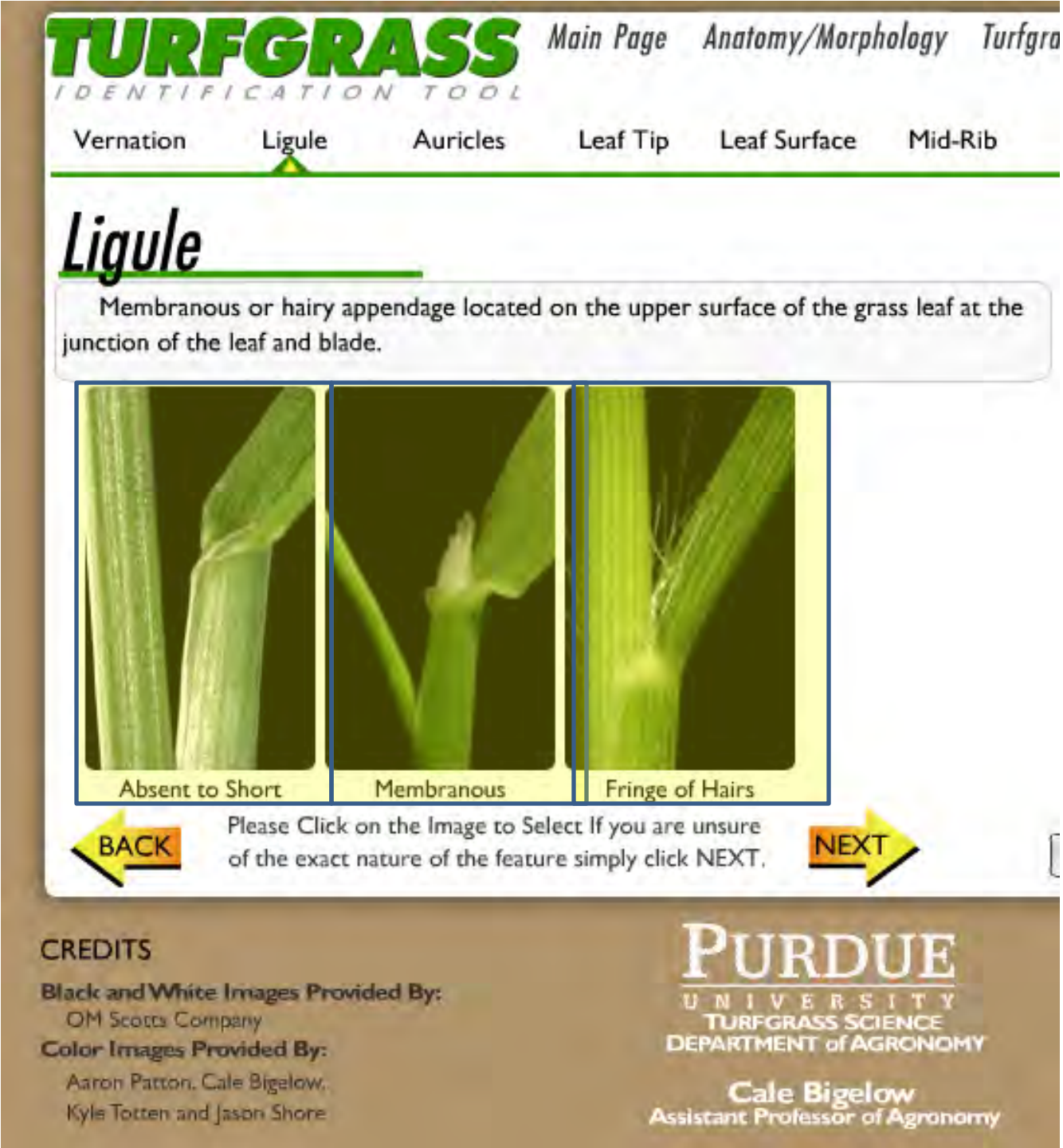


Rule of thumb: Most cool-season grasses have membranous ligules; most warm-season grasses have hair (and maybe a membranous ligule).

# Leaf Surface

The flattened portion of the leaf located above the sheath.

Smooth

Ridged

Sparsely Hairy

Hairy

BACK

Please Click on the Image to Select If you are unsure of the exact nature of the feature simply click NEXT.

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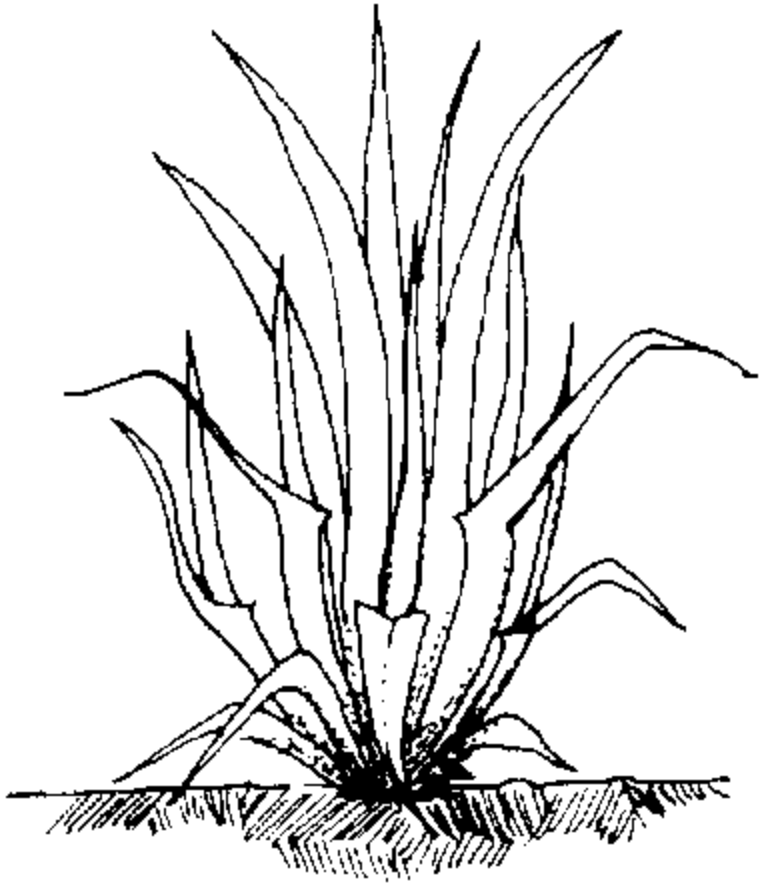
**Cale Bigelow**
Assistant Professor of Agronomy



These grasses produce only tillers (i.e. daughter plants)... incapable of rapid lateral spread, but tend to be very high density.

<u>Examples:</u>

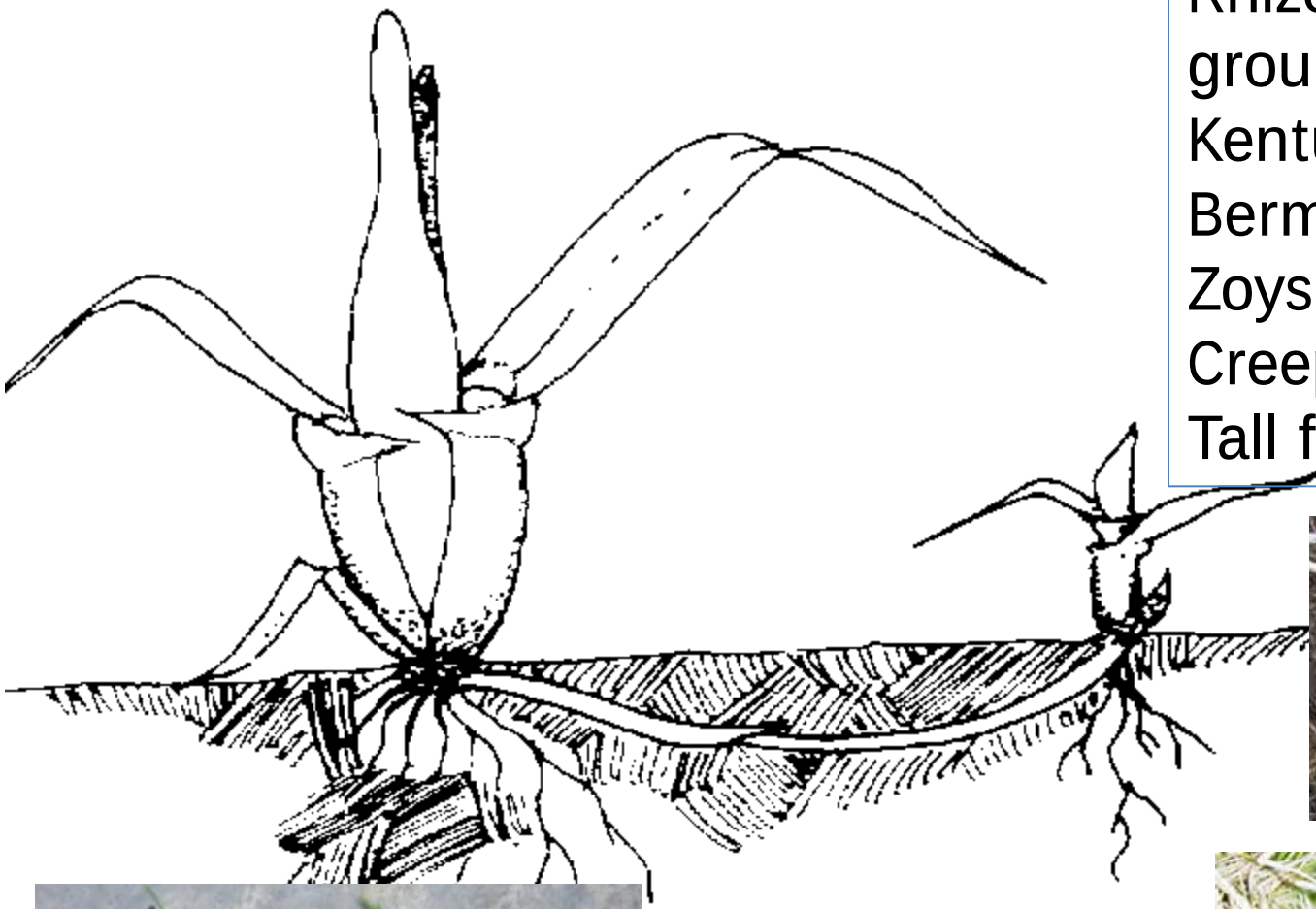
Perennial ryegrass
Tall fescue (managed as a bunch)
Hard fescue
Chewings fescue
Annual ryegrass

Stolons are above ground lateral stems.

<u>Examples:</u>

Creeping bentgrass
Bermudagrass
Zoysiagrass
St. Augustinegrass
Centipedegrass

Rhizomes are below ground stems:
Kentucky bluegrass
Bermudagrass
Zoysiagrass
Creeping red fescue
Tall fescue?

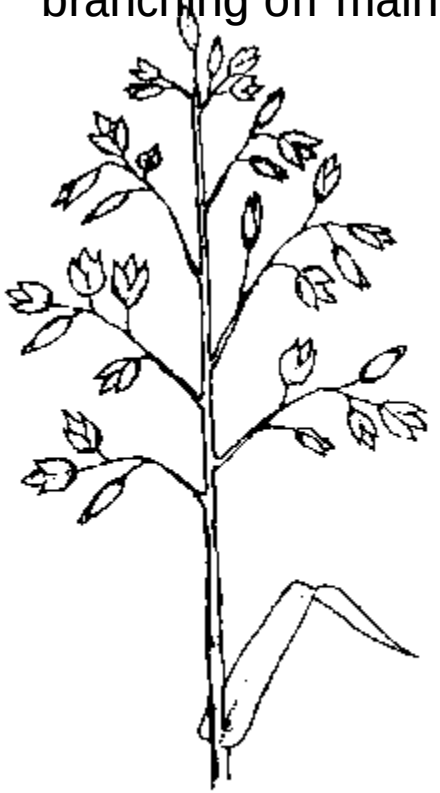


Rhizomatous

One branch (pedicel) off main stem (culm).

Secondary and tertiary branching off main stem.

Seed attached directly to culm.

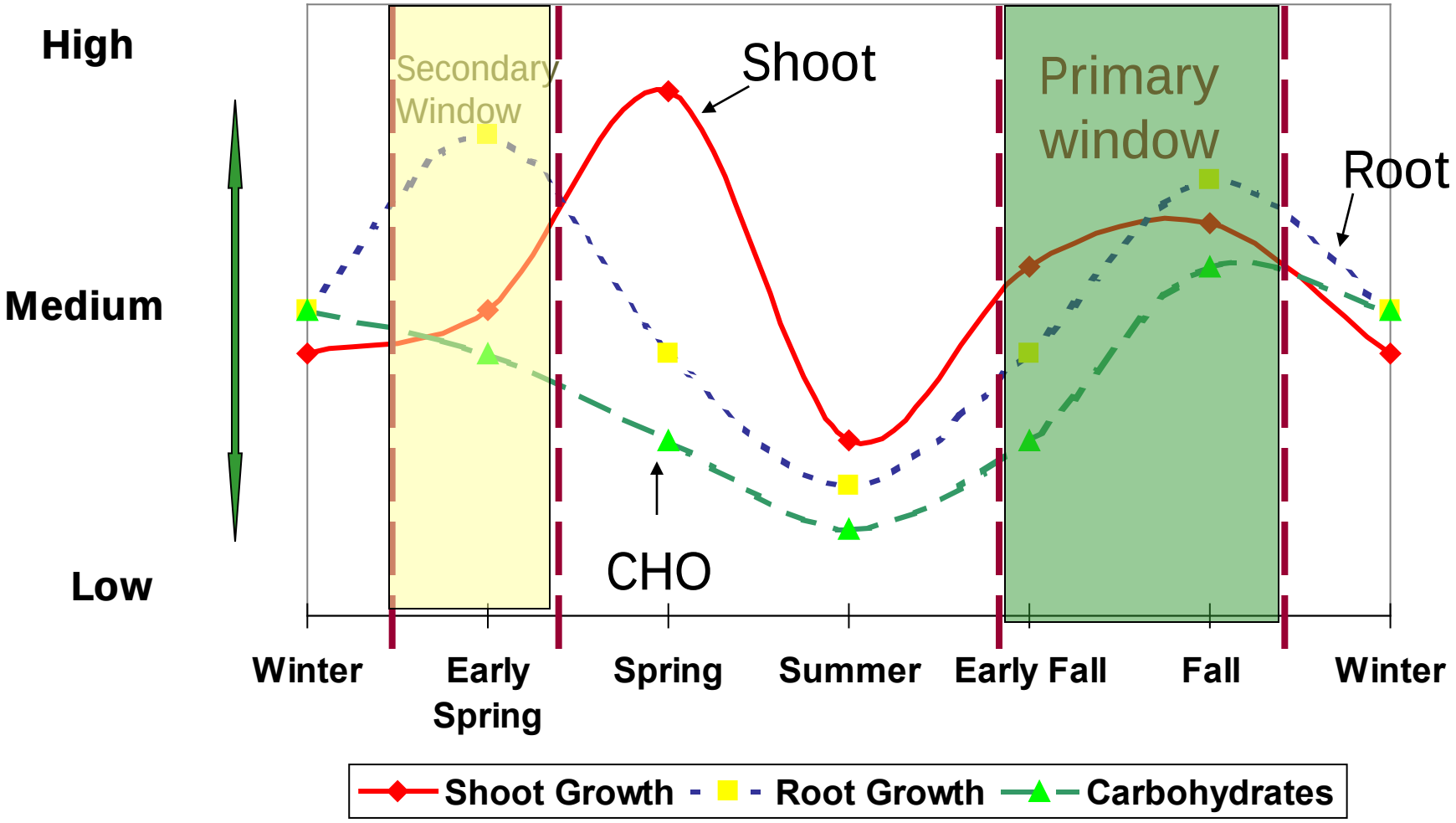


Panicle

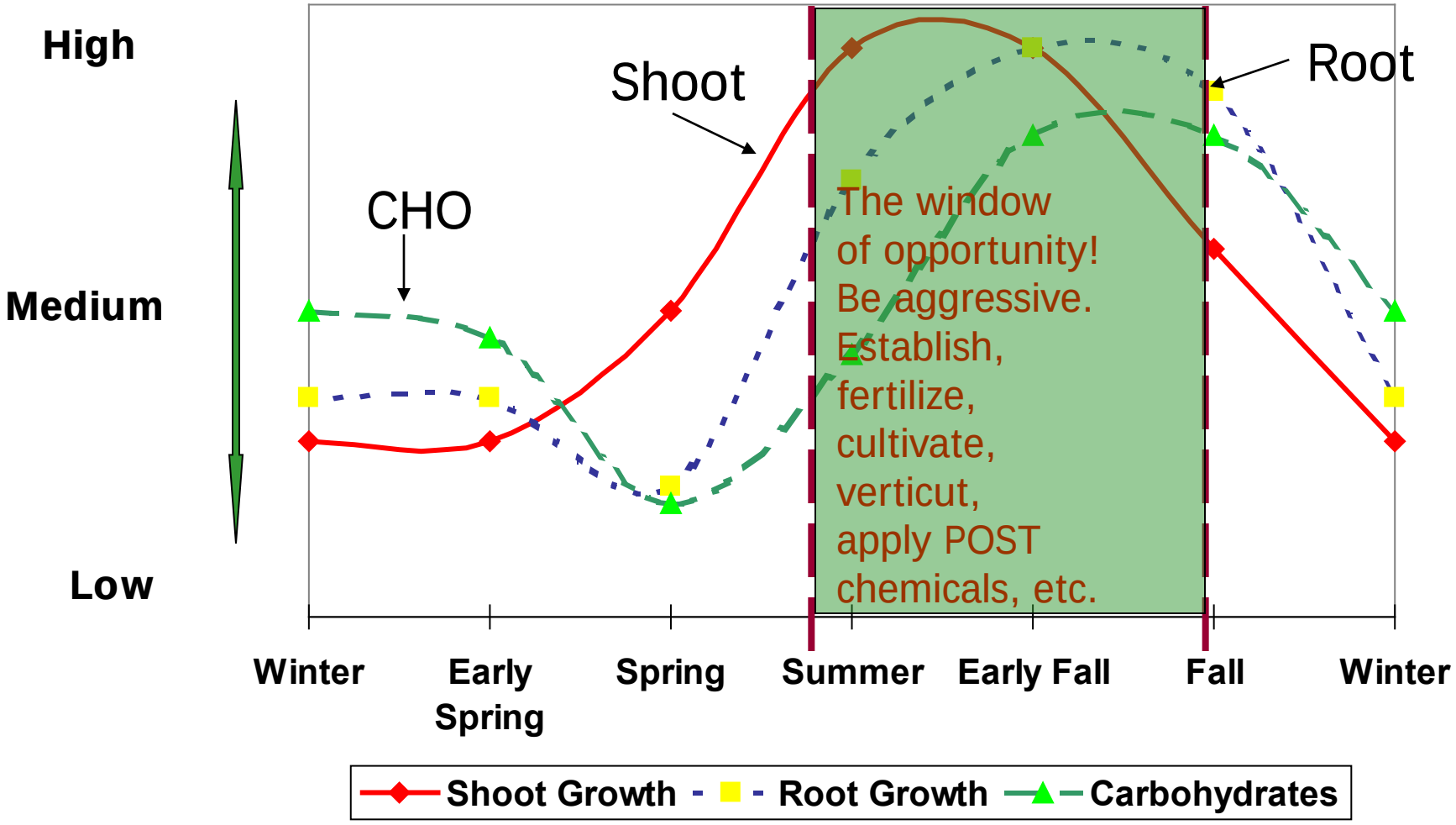
Spike


# Seasonal Growth and Developmental Patterns of Cool and Warm-Season Turfgrasses

# Seasonal Growth Patterns: Cool-Season Turfgrasses



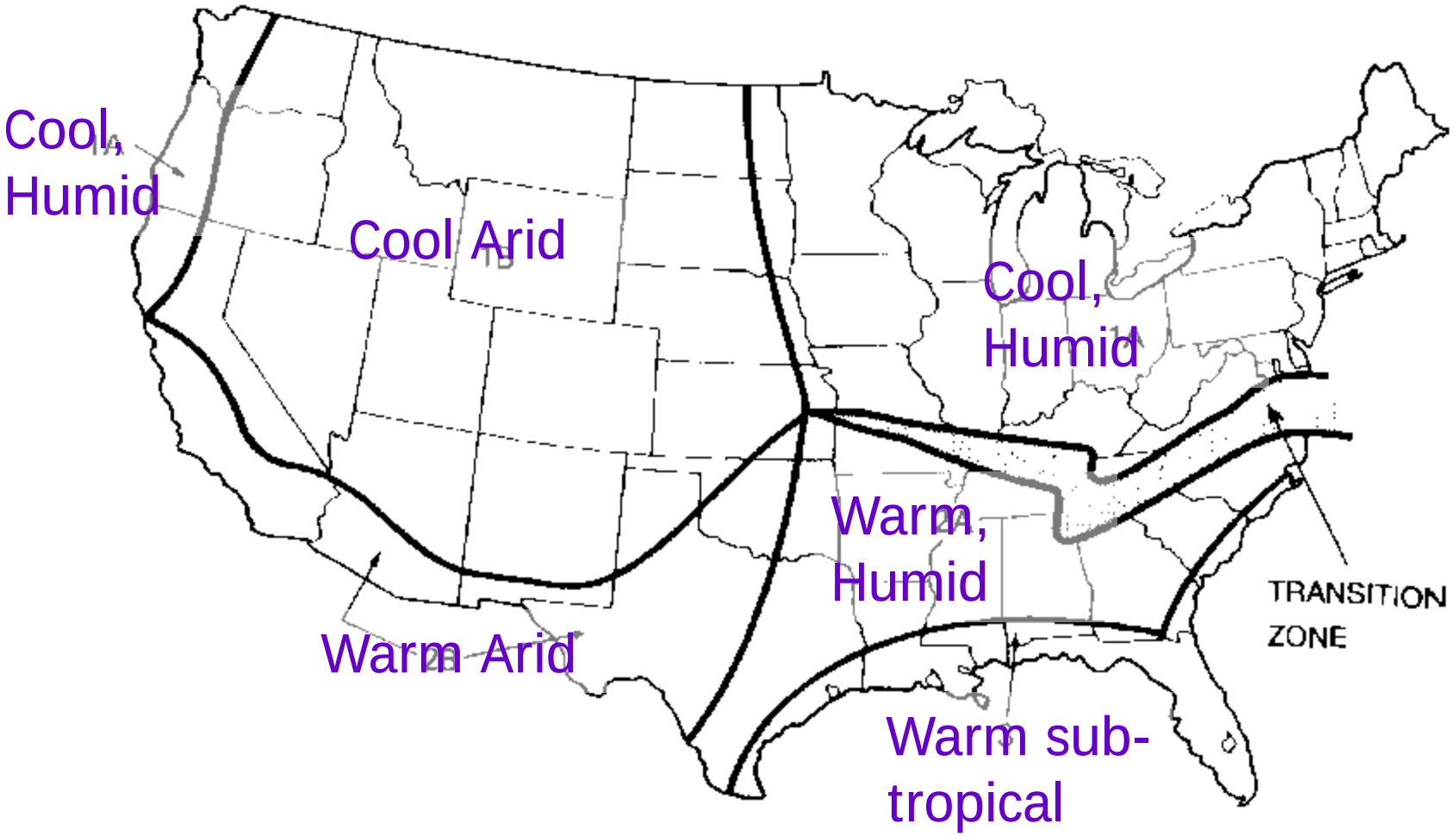
# Seasonal Growth Patterns: Warm-Season Turfgrasses



**Choosing a grass for VA is like this doorbell… just because it works doesn't mean it's always easy to use!**

# The primary cool-season turfgrasses of Virginia

# Adaptation Zones: National

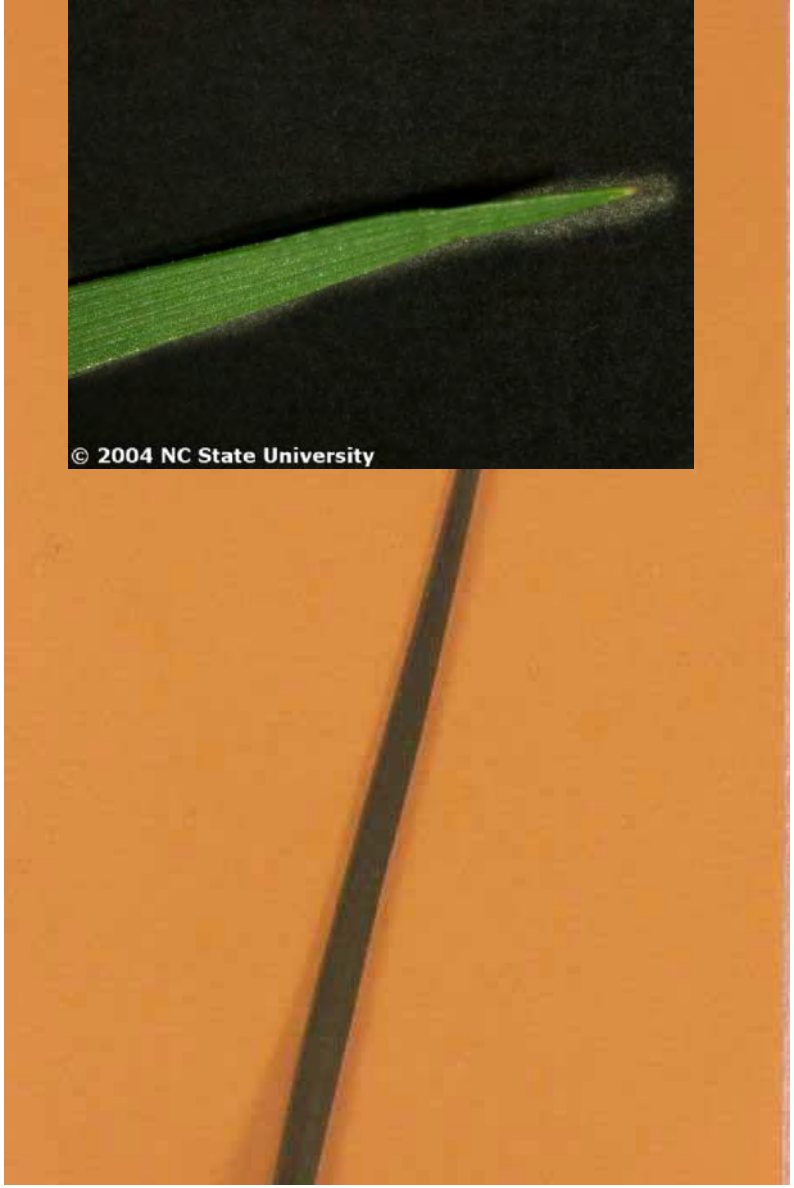


# Tall Fescue

- **Scientific name:**
  - *Festuca arundinacea* Schreb.

# Tall Fescue

- **Description:**
  - Medium/coarse texture but most recent turf-type varieties match up well in leaf texture with bluegrasses…
  - Distinctly rolled vernation
  - Very prominent parallel veins on leaf surface
  - Short membranous ligule, but difficult to see
  - Very stiff bladed, upright growing leaves -- similar to zoysia;  serrated leaf margins
  - Typically has purple color at base of stem




Needle-like leaf tip of tall fescue.


Prominent rolled vernation & parallel veination on leaf surface.

# Tall Fescue

- **Adaptation and Use:**
  - Managed as a bunch-type grass – but can produce determinate rhizomes; “rhizomatous tall fescues” released with further improvements likely.
  - Adapted to wide range of soil conditions... wet, dry, acid, alkaline
  - Does reasonably well in heat and drought b/c of drought avoidance... a very deep root system
  - Moderate to poor cold tolerance
  - Average shade tolerance
  - seed and sod readily available
  - Primary uses: home lawns, general purpose turf where ‘close clipping’ is not required, highway ROW, lower maintenance athletic fields

Tall fescue is the best adapted cool-season turfgrass across the state of Virginia

**Characteristics**:

- Excellent color and turf quality potential in fall through spring period
- Requires a very sharp mower blade

# Tall Fescue

- **Cultural intensity:**
  - Low/medium maintenance intensity… but still delivers an aesthetically pleasing canopy
  - 0.25-1.0 lbs N/1000sq ft/**growing month**… Turf Type tall fescues respond to higher maintenance levels, forage types don't need it
  - Particular problems with Brown Patch and Gray Leaf Spot under high maintenance situations (and improperly timed N fertilizer applications)
  - Little to no thatching tendency
  - Mowing height: 2-3" under optimal growing conditions; 'as high as mower can go' is desirable in summer for most parts of VA

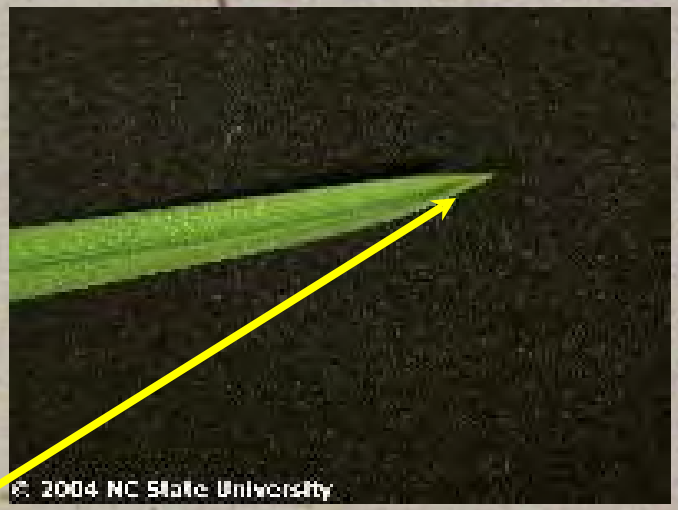
# Kentucky bluegrass

- Scientific name: *Poa pratensis* L.

# Kentucky bluegrass

- **Description:**
  - Fine to medium texture; prominently folded vernation
  - Determinate rhizomes,  but still an aggressive growth habit… good recuperative potential
  - Ligule is very short, membranous; very difficult to see… <u>not seeing it</u> is an ID feature

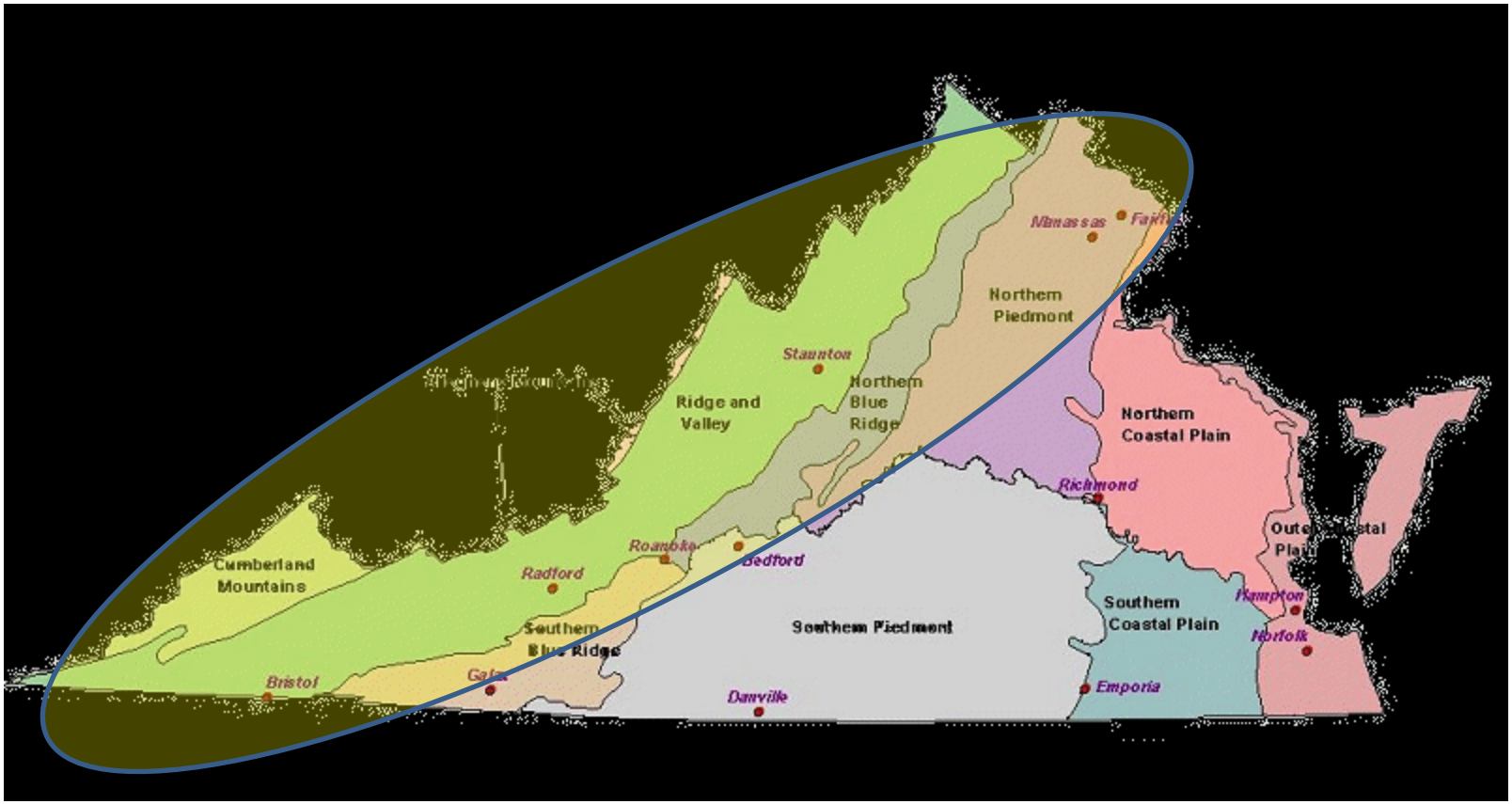
Folded vernation and a prominent mid-vein




Boat shaped leaf tip: note the “split” that can be made at the tip

Seedhead is a distinct panicle.

# The remaining ‘large acreage’ cool-season grasses (Kentucky bluegrass, perennial ryegrass,  and fine fescues) are best adapted to the Valley and Ridge region of Virginia



# Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*)

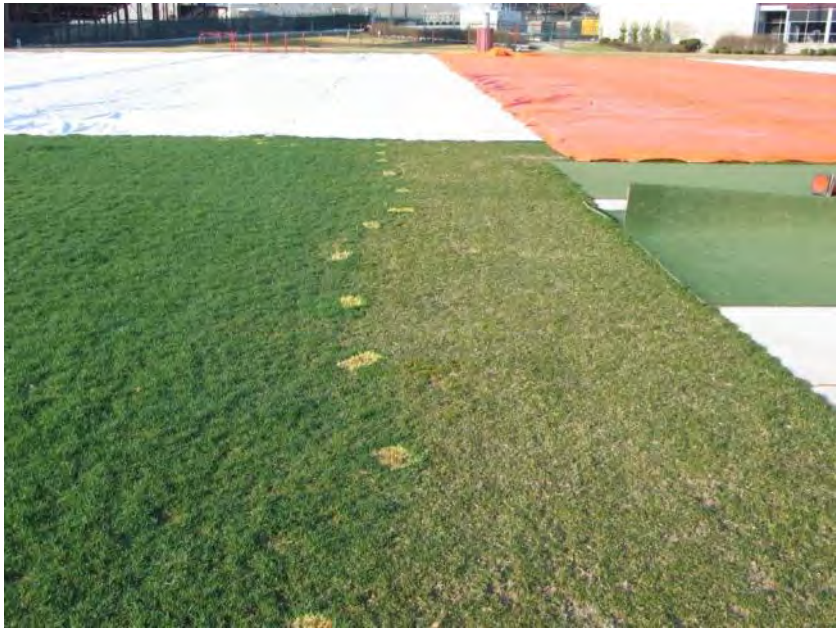
The most widely used cool-season turfgrass in the United States.

Lots of seed sources available; quite slow to germinate (≥ 60°F soil temp = 10 days; < 60° F = 14-21 days to germination); experimental cultivars showing faster establishment traits

Exceptionally dark green color and very dense turf: highly desirable features… but very difficult to grow in Piedmont and Tidewater regions of VA

# Kentucky bluegrass

- Adaptation and Use:
  - **Full sun turfgrass**
  - Prefers well drained soils, slightly acid pHs, high phosphorus levels
  - **Excellent winter hardiness; Summer dormancy mechanism**
  - Primary uses: full sun sites on home lawns, athletic fields, and golf course fairways (especially if newer, 'more tolerant of closer clipping' varieties are used)



Kentucky bluegrass is notoriously slow for spring greening... covers are being used to accelerate spring greening on the VT Football Practice Field.

# Kentucky bluegrass

- Cultural intensity:
  - **Moderate to high level of maintenance required to optimize its performance.**
  - 0.5-1 lb N/1000 sq ft/growing month
  - Very aggressive grower, heavy thatch former; can require vertical mowing
  - Mowing height: 1-2.5” (consider what this means for using on athletic fields and/or golf courses)
  - seed and sod available.

# Perennial Ryegrass
## *Lolium perenne*

Uses: components of lawns, fairways, tees, winter overseeding on bermudagrass, component of sports fields, popular as a component in mixtures with Ky BG and/or fine-leaf fescues for sun:shade turf

Characteristics: Bunch-type, weak sod former, noted for very quick establishment, shiny leaf, not particularly cold hardy

# Perennial Ryegrass

- Description:
  - Fine/medium texture
  - Bunch-type
  - Dark green color
  - Purple color at base
  - Folded vernation
  - Prominent mid-vein
  - Pointed rather than boat- shaped leaf tip
  - Waxy upper leaf surface results in a lot of glossy reflection: used for ‘striping’ turf

# Leaf ID Tips for PR vs. KBG

<u>Perennial ryegrass</u>
-prominent midvein but many ridges on leaf surface
-leaf tip not prominently keeled as Ky BG

<u>Kentucky bluegrass</u>
-prominent midvein but smooth leaf surface
-keeled or “boat shaped” leaf tip


Purple color at the base of the stem can be important in identifying *Lolium* and *Festuca*'s.

# Perennial Ryegrass

- Adaptation and Use Characteristics:
  - **Not tolerant to temperature extremes, but being bred for better heat tolerance… is this a good or bad thing? It depends on your use.**
  - **Extremely rapid seed germination (4-7 days)**
  - **Winter overseeding as a monostand used to be very popular for winter color/playability of warm-season turfs. Only bermudagrass is recommended for winter overseeding due to its aggressive recuperative potential and the availability of new selective herbicides for ryegrass control. Winter overseeded ryegrass will have an additional fertility requirement in nutrient management plans.**
  - Primary uses: home lawns (alone or in combo with KBG), sports turf, golf turf in mixtures with Kentucky bluegrass

# Perennial Ryegrass

- Cultural intensity:
  - Moderate to high levels of maintenance (0.5 to 1 lb N/1000 sq ft per active growing month… comparable to Kentucky bluegrass… ryegrass has a lot of disease pressure in much of Virginia)
  - Quick to green in spring, high mowing requirement during periods of active growth
  - **The most wear tolerant cool season turfgrass (but poor recuperative potential)**
  - No thatching intensity as it is a bunch grass
  - Mowing height: **0.5*** to 2.5”… distinguishes itself from most Ky bluegrasses in its tolerance to closer clipping heights


DUDY NOBLE FIELD


VT

# There are three major fine-leaf fescue species used for turf in Virginia

**Creeping red fescue**

***Festuca rubra* L.**

**Hard fescue**

***Festuca brevipila* Tracey**

**Chewings fescue**

***Festuca rubra* L.** ssp. ***fallax (Thuill.) Nyman***

**Sheep fescue* (more prominently used as an ornamental)**

***Festuca ovina* L.**

Needle-like leaf texture

# Fine fescue

- **Description:**
  - The finest leaf texture of the major turfgrasses… its most important ‘identification’ characteristic
  - Folded vernation
  - Managed as a bunch-type although creeping red has slender rhizomes
  - Highly variable colors


Fine fescue (hard fescue)… in 2009, this was a 3-yr old stand on a ‘no mow’ hillside in Spotsylvania Co.

# Fine fescue

- **Adaptation and Use Characteristics:**
  - Best shade tolerance of cool-season turfgrasses
  - Low water requirement
  - Intolerant of poorly drained soils
  - Excellent choice for low input turf in Valley and Ridge regions of VA … poor soils, steep slopes, ‘low maintenance turf’
  - Poor traffic tolerance
  - Many cultivars display excellent tolerance to glyphosate
  - Primary uses: home lawns (alone or in combo with KBG), particularly those in the shade; highway ROW turf, cemeteries, any other turf with low maintenance requirements

# Fine Fescue

- **Cultural intensity:**
  - **Best "poor-man's" grass for cool season climate; typically the lowest maintenance cool-season grass managed in VA**
  - fertility requirements: **1-2 lbs N/1000 sq ft/ growing season**
  - Mowing height: 1-2.5" typical, but can remain unmowed for the "native" look; slower growth habit than other cool-season grasses

# Creeping Bentgrass

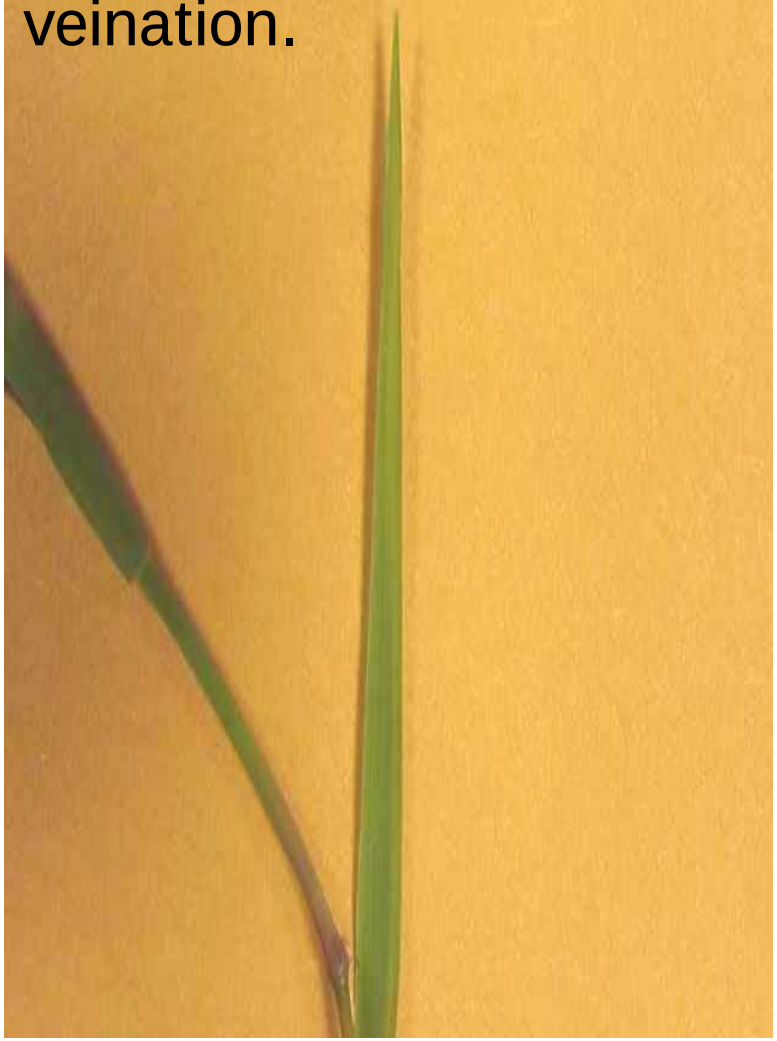
- Scientific name:
  - *Agrostis stolonifera* L.

# Creeping Bentgrass

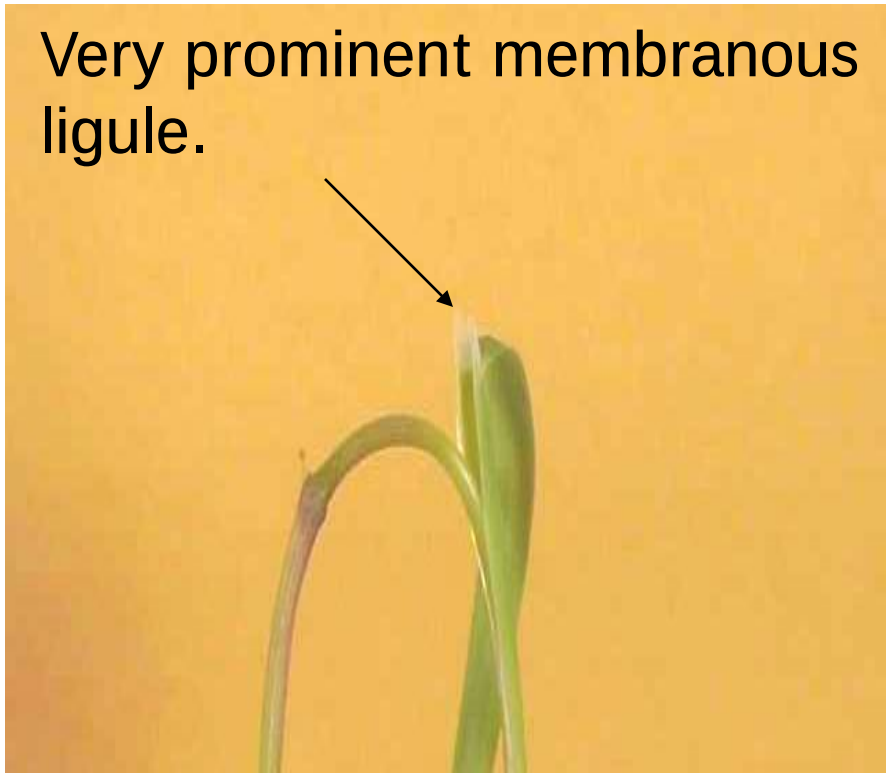
- **Description:**
  - Stoloniferous grass but it is managed essentially as a bunch grass given its low clipping height requirements for golf turf use.
  - Rolled vernation
  - Very prominent membranous ligule
  - Numerous parallel veins on leaf surface
  - Sharp pointed leaf tip
  - Very soft to the touch (“baby powder” feel)

Unmowed, creeping bentgrass displays an aggressive stoloniferous growth habit. Managed at heights of 0.25” or less, it essentially behaves and is managed as a bunch grass.


Distinctive needle-like leaf tip with prominent parallel veination.



Very prominent membranous ligule.



# Creeping Bentgrass

- **Adaptation and Use:**
  - Almost exclusively used for golf turf… almost all greens, many tees, and some fairways around the state; regular mowing height requirements (typically 3-6 days per week during active growing periods) of 0.1 to 0.5 inches; outside of golf turf use it is usually considered a problematic weed
  - Average shade tolerance
  - Outstanding cold tolerance
  - The shallowest root system of the maintained cool-season grasses
  - Poor drought and traffic tolerance, while heat tolerance is surprisingly good
  - The most disease susceptible cool-season turfgrass

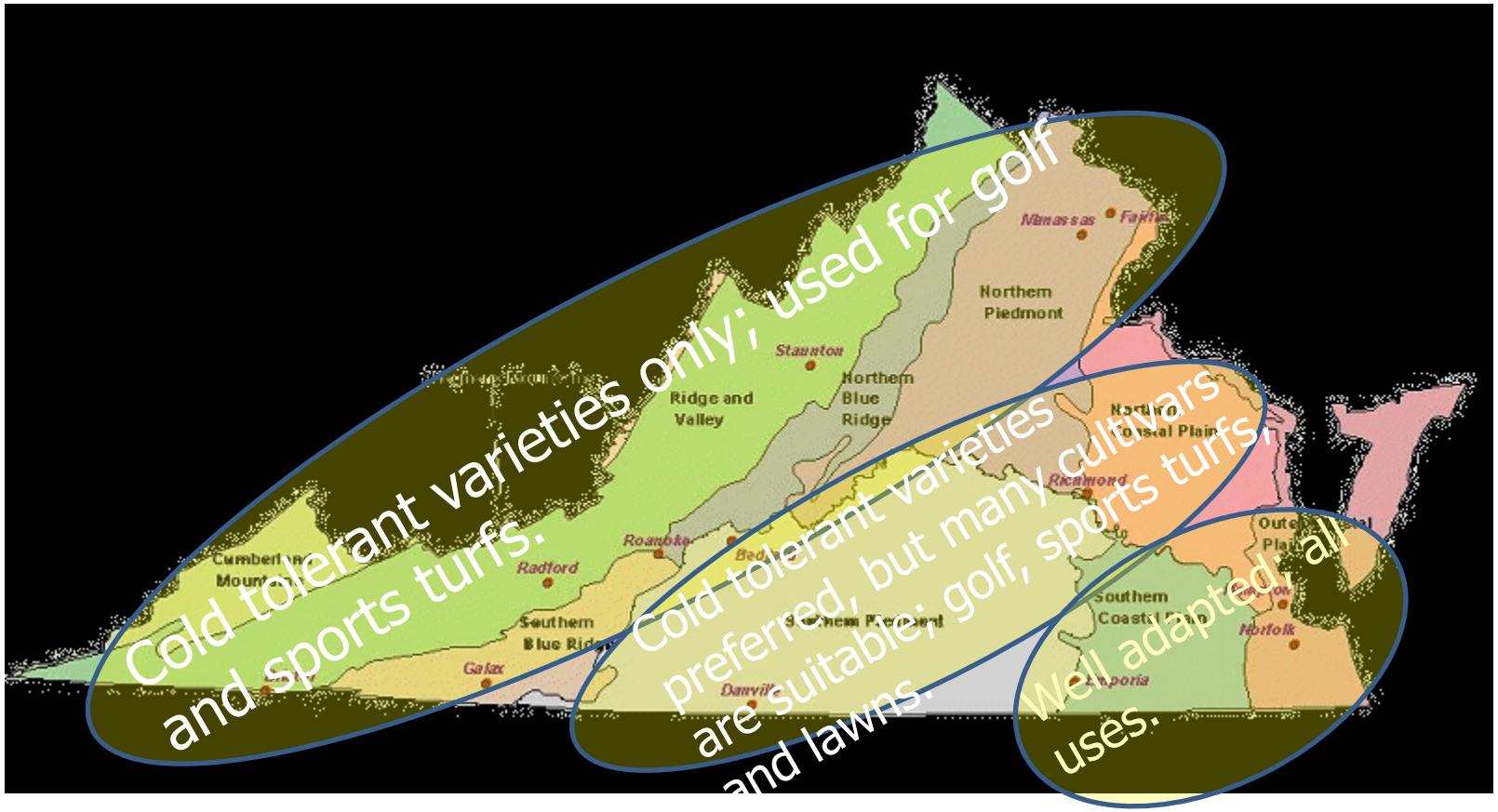
# Creeping Bentgrass

- **Cultural intensity:**
  - Very high (likely the highest maintenance cool-season turfgrass)
  - Reel mowers are usually required
  - Supplemental irrigation and fungicide applications necessary
  - 0.25 to 1#N/1000 sq ft/growing month typical depending on the situation
  - Vertical mowing (dethatching) likely required over time

# The primary warm-season turfgrasses of Virginia


Primary concern with use of warm-season grasses by homeowners is winter dormancy period.

# Bermudagrass adaptation zones



# Bermudagrass

- **Description:**
  - Folded vernation, but can be difficult to tell
  - No prominent mid-vein on leaf blade
  - Ligule: fringe of hairs… often hairs on the leaf and blade as well
  - Both rhizomes and stolons
  - Seedhead… “pinwheel” arrangement of spicate branches
    - mostly 4 to 5 branches within an area => usually denotes “common” type
    - mostly 3 branches => vegetative (triploid) hybrid

# Bermudagrass: *Cynodon* spp.

# Bermudagrass

- **Adaptation and Use:**
  - The most aggressively spreading warm season grass… very high mowing requirement in the summer.. Top turfgrass, major weed.
  - Almost any application in adapted zone… lawns, highway ROW, sports fields, golf courses
  - 4-5 months of dormancy in late fall/early spring
  - Very efficient user of water; deep root system
  - Minimal pest pressure
  - Shade tolerance very poor
  - Winter kill potential? Can be of concern. Certain cultivars are selected with this in mind.





**Vegetative Bermudagrass Varieties 5/20/2011**
**Turf Research Center, Blacksburg, VA**





**Seeded Bermudagrass Varieties 5/20/2011**
**Turf Research Center, Blacksburg, VA**

# Bermudagrass: *Cynodon* spp.

**Two species of major importance:**

"Common types" *(C. dactylon*) -- establishment from seed is likely, but most cultivars have traditionally been considered inferior in turf quality as compared to vegetative varieties. However, times have changed.

"Hybrid bermudagrasses" *(C. dactylon* x *transvaalensis*) -- sterile grasses that can only be established vegetatively. These grasses have typically provided superior turf density and finer leaf textures.

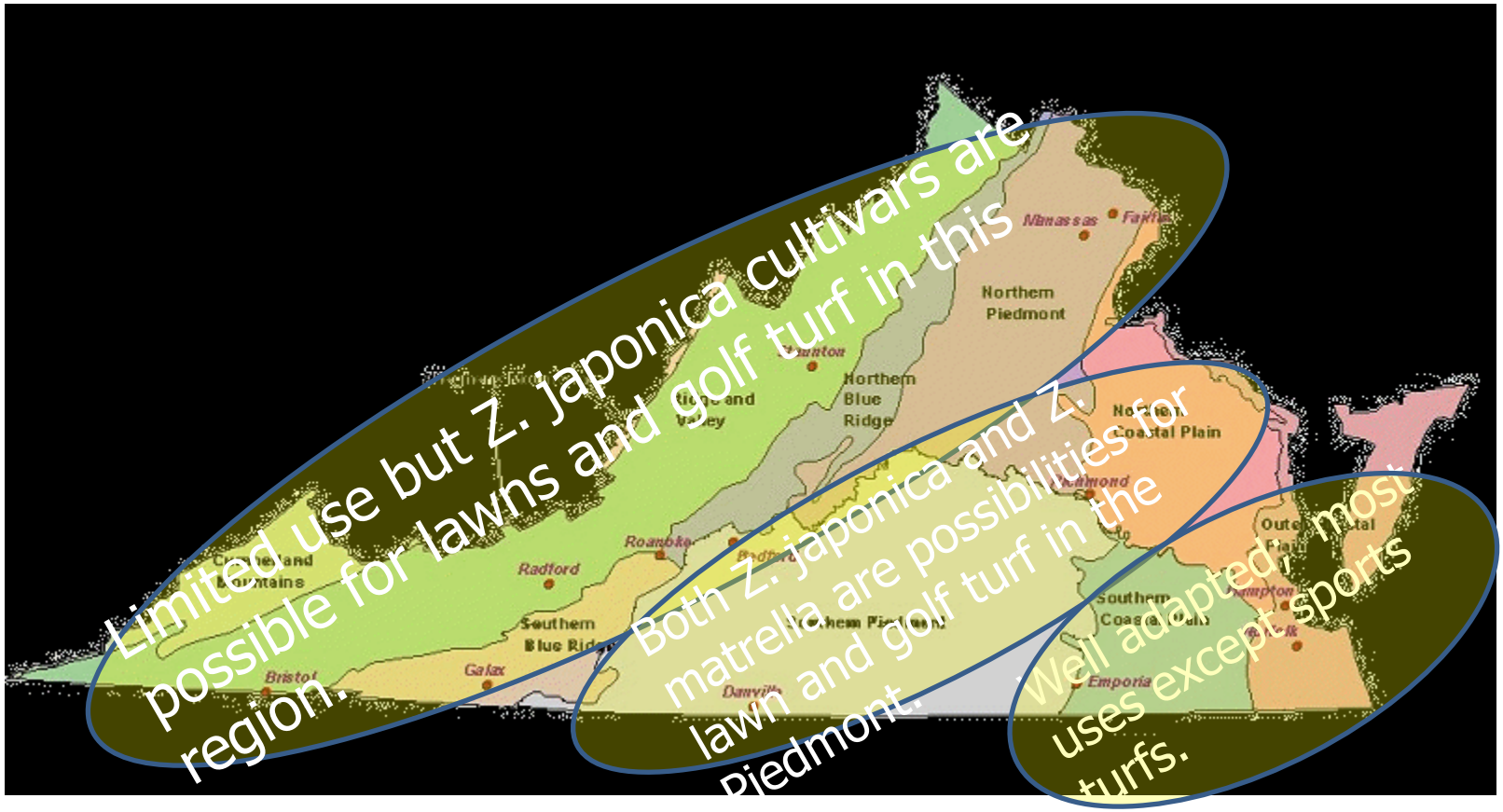
# Bermudagrass

- **Cultural intensity:**
  - Low to High… what is the situation?
    - Low = highway ROW turf in Piedmont and Coastal Plan regions.
    - High = golf course fairways, tees, high-end athletic fields
- Fertility for mod-high maintenance:
  - 0.5-1#N/1000 $ft^2$/growing month possible
- Cutting heights: (vary with cultivar)
  - 0.5 to 1” on golf fairways, tees, and athletic fields
  - 1 to 2.5” on home lawns; 4-6” for ROW turf

# Zoysiagrass

- Scientific name:
  - *Zoysia japonica* Steud. -- common name is ‘Japanese lawngrass’
  - *Z. matrella* (L.) Merr. => ‘manilagrass’

# Zoysiagrass adaptation zones



# Zoysiagrass

- Description:
  - prominent rolled vernation
  - both stolons and rhizomes; rhizomes with the right angle branching and stolons with the “spear” tips where leaf blades are not expanded as compared to the leaf sheaths.
  - slender raceme for an inflorescence; for most cultivars, usually present in the spring
  - Leaf tip has characteristic steeple shape


Right-angle
branching of
zoysiagrass stems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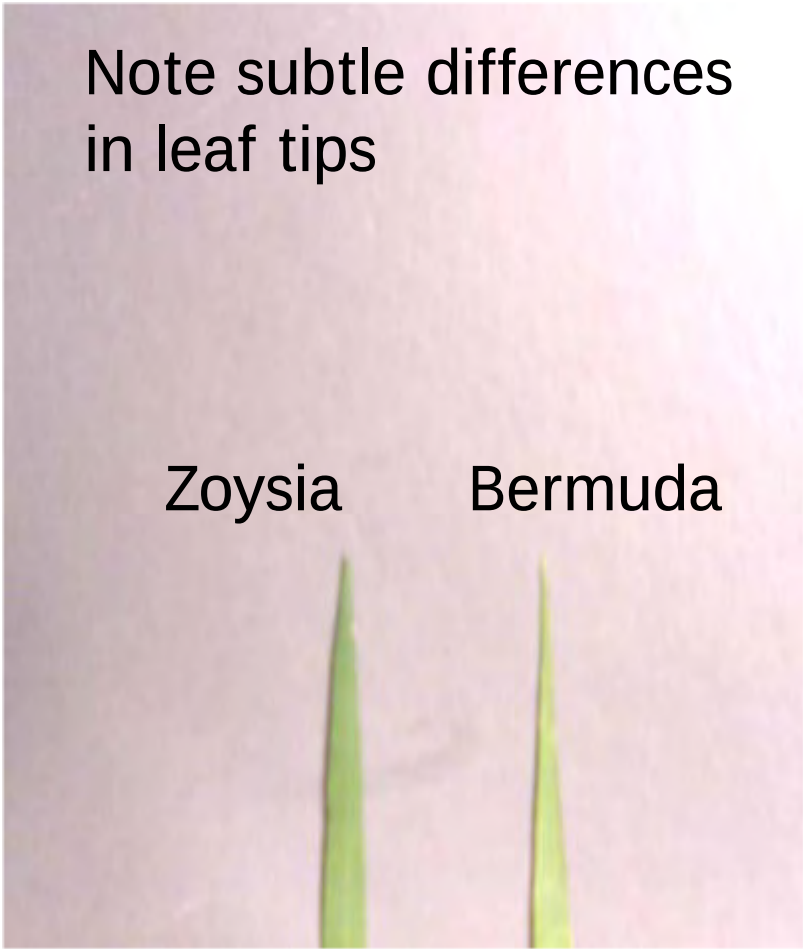
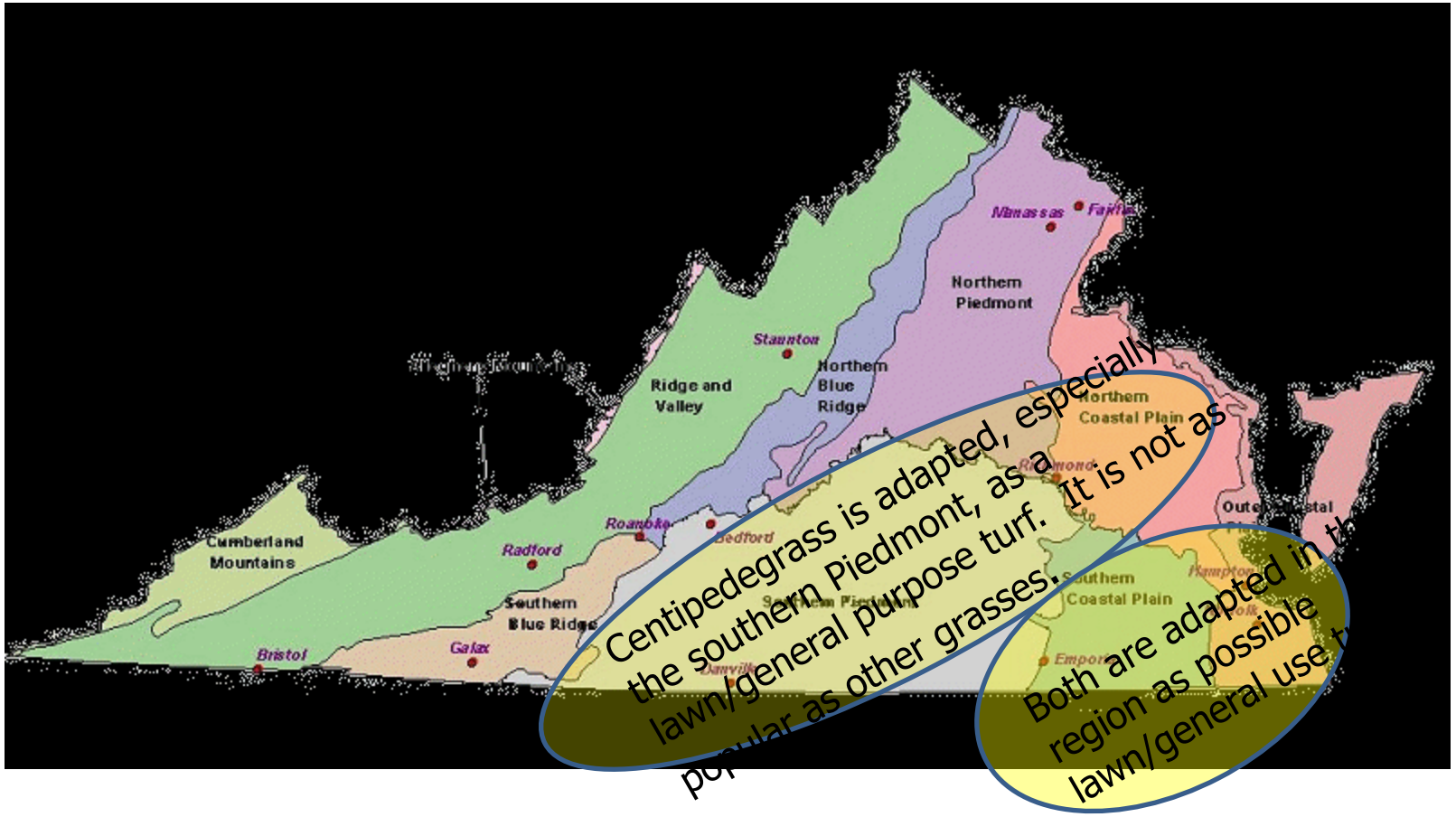
# Distinguishing Characteristics Between Zoysiagrass and Bermudagrass

# Zoysiagrass

- **Adaptation and Use:**
  - Exceptional cold tolerance of Z. japonica cultivars lends itself to use just about anywhere in the state. Z. matrella cultivars throughout Piedmont and Coastal Plain… some have shown good performance in Valley and Ridge
  - Highly popular as a lawn grass; some use for golf turf fairways and tees.
  - Average shade tolerance (better than bermuda).
  - Much slower spreading than bermudagrass. Very slow to establish if seeded, sprigged or plugged.
  - 4-5 months of dormancy in late fall/early spring
  - Good water use efficiency; not as good as bermuda

# Centipedegrass and St. Augustinegrass



# Centipedegrass

- Scientific name: [*Eremochloa ophiuroides (*Munro.) Hack]


# Centipedegrass

- Description:
  - prominent folded vernation
  - Strongly stoloniferous; blunt-shaped leaf tip.
  - Individually stacked nodes rather than clusters of two to three
  - slender spike for an inflorescence; for most cultivars, the seedheausually present in the spring
  - Characteristic yellow-green color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# Centipedegrass

- **Adaptation and Use:**
  - Average shade tolerance
  - Average cold tolerance
  - Good water use efficiency, but not comparable to bermudagrass
  - Excellent turf density with minimal maintenance requirement
  - Poor traffic tolerance
  - Dormant 4-5 months out of the year
  - Not recommended to be overseeded
  - Performs best in acidic soils (pH of 5.5-6.5 ideal)

# Centipedegrass

- **Cultural intensity:**
  - The lowest input warm-season turf; requires less mowing than any other species and very limited fertility: 1-2 lbs N/1000 sq ft annually
  - Seed available; can be established from sod, sprigs, or plugs as well
  - 1-2 inch cutting height
  - Reponds well to foliar applications of iron
  - Primary uses: low-trafficked lawns, highway ROW, cemeteries

# St. Augustinegrass
# Scientific name: *Stenotaphrum secundatum*

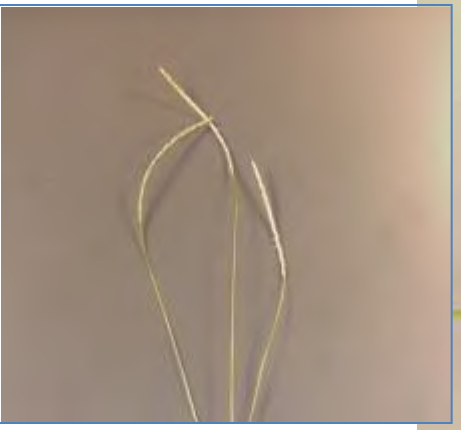
# St. Augustinegrass

- **Adaptation and Use:**
  - Best shade tolerance of any warm-season turfgrass grown in Virginia
  - Poor cold tolerance
  - Good water use efficiency, but not comparable to bermudagrass
  - Excellent turf density
  - High maintenance grass re: mowing requirement and possible pest pressure: the most disease susceptible warm-season grass
  - Dormant 4-5 months out of the year
  - Not recommended to be overseeded

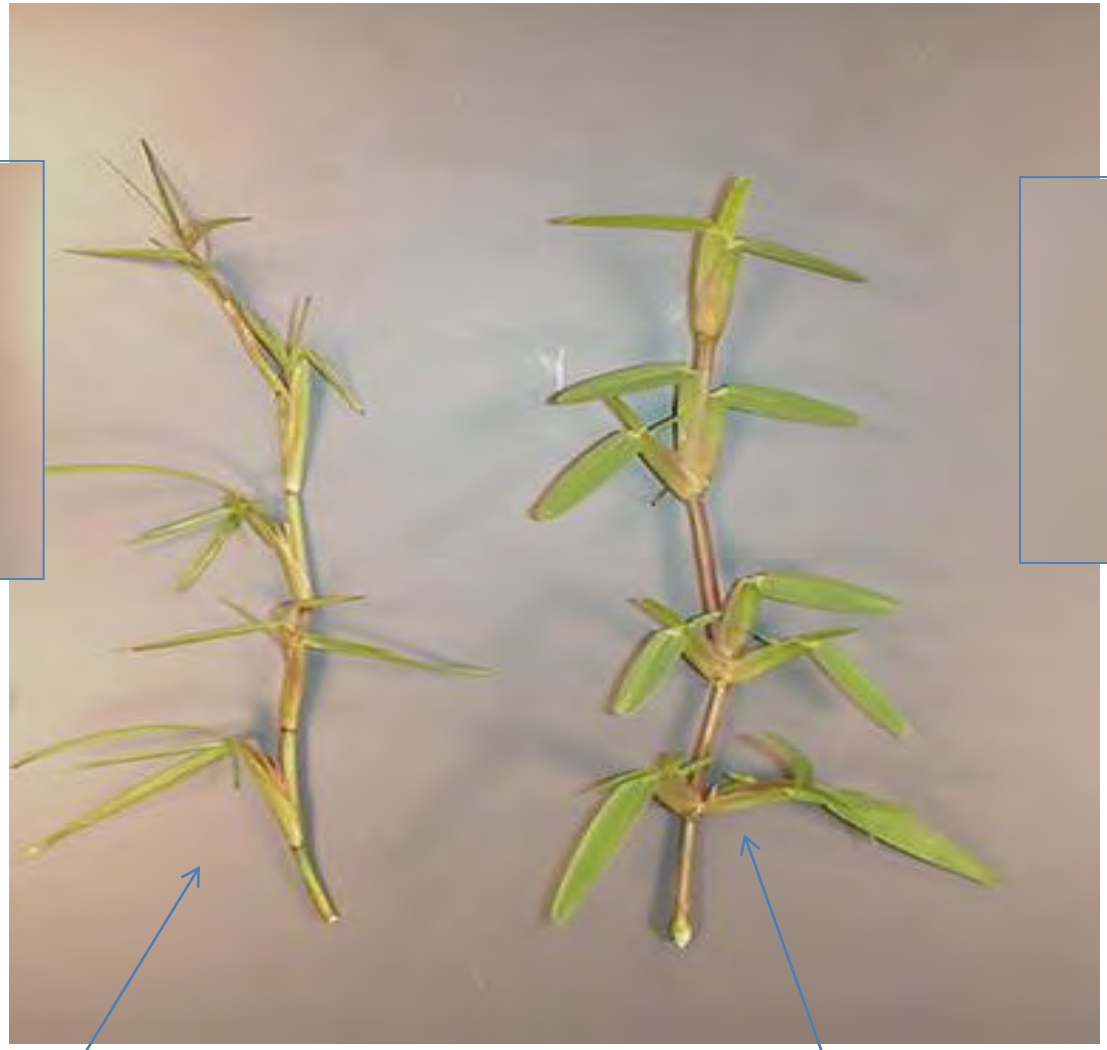
# St. Augustinegrass
# *Stenotaphrum secundatum*

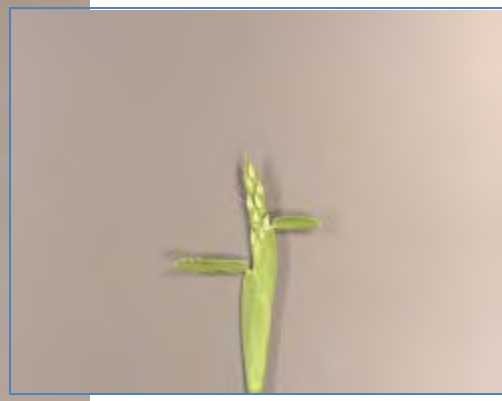
- **Cultural Intensity:**
  - High disease and insect pressure
  - High mowing requirement (aggressive creeper)
  - 2-3 inch mowing requirement
  - 0.5 to 1 lb N/1000 sq ft/growing month
  - use limited primarily to areas where temperatures are moderated by the Atlantic Ocean, particularly shaded sites

  - Primary uses: homelawns and general purpose turf with shaded sites in particular being popular near the southeastern coast of Virginia



Very thin spike for a seedhead on centipede





Unique spike in which seed are actually embedded in the stem on St. Aug.

Centipedegrass: regularly spaced nodes give “alternate” shoot arrangement

St. Augustinegrass: stacked nodes give “opposite” shoot arrangement


0.5 to 1.5 lb N/1000 sq ft total during winter thru spring growing window of ryegrass

# Another alternative for “green” grass – turf paints.

Dec 16, 2009 Before and After - Zoysia

Please utilize our Turf and Garden Tips weblog at: www.ext.vt.edu/turfandgardentips

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## Turf and Garden Tips

Turf and horticulture experts detail best management practices in how to attain a great looking lawn and landscape with environmentally-friendly management strategies. What grasses and ornamental plants are best suited for your site? How do you establish or renovate a lawn or ornamental bed? How do you safely and effectively manage pests?

*Jan 13, 2010*

### I Think My Lawn Has Died This Winter

This podcast discusses how two perennial warm-season weeds in cool-season lawns (nimblewill and bermudagrass) can lead one to think that portions of their lawn has died over the winter months. These warm-season grasses go dormant at first killing frost, and while nothing can be done to control them during the winter, plans can be made for chemical control strategies for the coming season.


*Jan 07, 2010*

### My Turf's on Ice

This podcast details the importance of keeping traffic off of frost or ice-covered turf, what kind of damage to expect, and how long the damage will likely persist.

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**For More Information**

- For further information regarding the most appropriate grasses for your area consult your local Virginia Cooperative Extension office (www.ext.vt.edu/).
- Additional educational opportunities:
  - Virginia Turfgrass Short Course, Dec. 11-13, Fredericksburg Expo and Convention Ctr. (for more info, www.vaturf.org)
  - Virginia Turfgrass Conference, Fredericksburg, Jan. 28-31, 2013