



Kitts Creek Grass on Single-family Home Lots

To help homeowners who were not here or do not remember why the decision was made to continue with tall fescue as the only grass type on single-family home lots, here is a summary of the decision criteria, followed by the full notes from the meeting with the grass expert from NC State, Dr. Miller:

May 2018

After a lot of careful consideration, the HOA Board has made a decision about alternative grasses in Kitts Creek.

We know this is an important topic for many of you and wanted to give the details that went into our decision to not make a change to long-established policy and allow multiple types of grasses for the single-family homes in Kitts Creek:

- The original developer made the choice for tall fescue many years ago and by the time we had a say in the matter, over 12 years had passed and all single-family home yards were installed with tall fescue. If we could start from scratch, we might choose differently, but we are too far down this path.
- Additionally, tall fescue is the most popular type of grass in our area for the reasons called out by Dr. Miller (full notes below).
- Sometimes we hear that Dr. Miller is a “so-called” expert and that some homeowners feel they know better. Please review his credentials. And he has worked with neighborhoods all over our area on this issue and knows all of the challenges with each type and with the neighborhood setting. His expertise in this area of landscape science is solid.
- Dr. Miller advised against having additional grass types alongside fescue on lots that are so close together. It would surely lead to upset among neighbors, and often has since warm-season grass types spread.
- Realtors we consulted advised against multiple grass types as the patchwork look is not appealing to new buyers and would hurt our resale values. Additionally, since each type of grass is green and thriving at different times, there will always be a time where parts of the neighborhood can look messy and not well maintained in comparison.



- During this process, we heard from at least 3 times more neighbors who insisted that we not change the grass types at this point in Kitts Creek than wanted more grass options or a complete change. They'd invested years and money learning how to have beautiful tall fescue lawns here and had accomplished that and were strongly opposed to undoing the 12+ year rules on grass types. Listening to our neighbors is important.
- There are beautiful tall fescue yards all over Kitts Creek. The late summer and early fall are the most challenging with this type but following the tall fescue care criteria with consistency will produce a very healthy and nice yard most of the year. Perfect lawns are not required. All tall fescue lawns will have areas that are stressed or challenged at the end of the hot season and those are quickly remedied by the fall services and being consistent all year long in keeping the grass at a healthy height, not letting it ever get too high or cutting too low, watering appropriately, and applying the pre-emergent weed treatment/fertilizer/ lime soil treatment etc on schedule. (a complete care guide is linked in the notes below)

What about totally switching to a new type? You might wonder if we can't have 2 types of grasses alongside each other, why not switch to a new grass type for all single-family lawns?

- The HOA Board cannot reasonably force homeowners to switch grass types in an established yard that was installed pre-closing and followed the Covenants that were in effect at the time. And tall fescue has been the required grass for single-family homes in Kitts Creek at all times since the beginning.
- Even if we could, the cost would be unbearable for many - \$5,000+ depending on the yard size, some more than \$10,000. (per 2 landscaping companies)

Grass Meeting - 3/14/2018
Notes from the discussion

Speaker: Dr. Grady Miller, NC State

Credentials:

<https://cals.ncsu.edu/crop-and-soil-sciences/people/grady-miller/>



The ARC Committee and KC HOA Board asked Dr. Miller to come and speak to us about the Pros and Cons of the different warm and cool weather grasses and give us a recommendation about grass types on single-family home lots in Kitts Creek based on his professional expertise and experience.

- The Triangle is in a between zone - between where warm weather grasses and cooler weather grasses are optimal. This means there are advantages and issues with each.
- Neither will do well all year: cool weather grass struggles in the heat of July & August, warm-weather grass experiences “winter kill” in January & February (winter kill was particularly lethal this year)
- Because this area is an in-between zone, homeowners must accept the idea that there will need to be investment and rehabilitation for their lawns of one kind or another every year regardless of the grass type that exists. (Like you’re used to doing in the Fall with fescue aeration and seeding)
- Warm weather grasses: Bermuda is not at all recommended. If going with warm weather grass, choose to allow Zoysia
- Feedback on the grasses comes from NTEP trials we conduct (over 300 different varieties each year)
- All grass needs sunlight. Fescue is more shade tolerant. Zoysia will have issues in shady areas under trees, between houses, on the North sides of houses. Areas of Kitts Creek with mature trees already know this and the newer sections will have mature trees in a few years.
- A bit of history: after the big drought in 2007 & 2008, many towns, Cary included, offered incentives to homeowners who used more drought-tolerant grasses. Many sod farmers moved to Bermuda and lots of builders followed. Bermuda became more popular with many falsely believing Bermuda does not need as much upkeep. They found out the error of their thinking: the upkeep is just different and timed differently than fescue. In recent years, the issues with Bermuda have moved the sod farmers back to producing about 70% Fescue types. Fescue has always been the most common grass in this area, aside from the brief reaction to that drought period.
- It should be noted that a *new* tall fescue lawn (or any lawn) requires lots of work and consistency to get it established. If this is not done in the first few years when the home is new, the homeowner will always be playing catch up until this level of



work is consistently applied. After a tall fescue lawn is established, normally after 3 years or so, much less water is needed and few weeds will develop provided the spring pre-emergent applications are done.

Pros and Cons:

Fescue -

- Will struggle in hot weather and go dormant. Will struggle next to hot concrete.
- Needs watering even when dormant.
- Must be aerated and seeded in the fall because of this
 - Note* - avoid using the smaller aerators that homeowners can rent. They do not produce cores that are deep enough. You need the larger ones that commercial providers use.
- It is a myth that it can't do well in the Triangle. If it is installed right and cared for, it can be as hardy as warm weather grasses. **Both** types need heavy watering when new or overseeded and less when established.
- Usually, homeowners that struggle with Fescue do so because of not understanding it.
 - Must be cut much higher. If you cut it too short, it will die. Homeowners like to cut it short thinking they will have to cut it less often. This is untrue plus will kill their lawns. It should never be cut shorter than 3 inches -4 inches is better - usually the highest setting on a home mower. Biltmore has Fescue and they cut it to 5 inches.
 - Must be cut every 5-8 days in the cooler weather (spring & fall), 7-14 in the summer
 - Never let it get high enough that you are cutting off more than 1/3 of the blades.
 - Pre-emergent weed killer must be applied by around March 15th and crabgrass pre-treatment about 6 weeks later. Soil conditioning & fertilization must be done. Total treatments, aside from Fall aeration & seeding, is about 6 per year.
 - Do not fertilize in the hot weather - use the right treatment at the right time of year
 - It can be very hardy if these things are done with the right watering.
- Fescue does not spread. It will not encroach on flower/garden beds unless some seeds get in the bed and is easily weeded out.



- Susceptible to “Brown Spot” - easily treatable by the homeowner if the homeowner can spot it and does not think it means more water.
- Tolerates shady areas better than any warm-season grass
- Can tolerate full sun very well if well established - “I grow tons of Tall Fescue in full sun”
- How to care for Tall Fescue: <https://www.turffiles.ncsu.edu/grasses/tall-fescue/>

Zoysia -

- Tolerates hot weather well with good care.
- Will suffer in any shade at all
- Needs as much water as Fescue to get established, slightly less than fescue once established but not significantly less
- Needs fertilization and weed treatments just like fescue but different timing
- Less “tricky” to learn how to care for it
- Can be cut lower - needs cutting every 7 days or so all summer when healthy
- Will spread! It will get into adjacent beds requiring much more weeding than fescue and into neighboring yards

Anecdote: Dr. Miller had a good friend go from Fescue to Bermuda after the drought in 2008. Bermuda had lots of weed & health issues as well so he took that out and went to Zoysia. He had winter kill issues and issues with it dying in any amount of shade plus noticed the upkeep was not significantly less than Fescue. He is now that out and returning to Fescue this year.

Dr. Miller’s Advice for Kitts Creek:

- Single-family homes are already all Fescue for the most part and houses are close together. All yards have trees - some mature and some still maturing but will be mature. Shade will be an issue with warm weather grasses and over the long term, you will be unhappy with Zoysia with mature trees and shade
- Switching to Zoysia will be expensive - you have to remove the fescue (dig it out), prepare the soil and redo the sod then heavily water while it gets established. And you’d have to have whole sections agree to switch. Plus Zoysia is the most expensive sod to buy - and using seed will not be successful.
- It will not work to have different grass types in different yards here because they are too close together with no natural separations like woods or pine straw/mulch -



and it will look messy because when one is brown the other will be green and vice versa

- In neighborhoods where this has been tried, there are many disagreements and some are quite bad, unfortunately. “Neighbors have become REALLY upset with each other - I’ve seen it.”
- “Teach homeowners who need help how to care for Fescue. Teach about the height it needs, the 6 or so treatments it needs each year, brown patch and how often to mow and they can be very happy with it. Make the most of what you already have here.”
- ***There is no lawn that is “work free”*** and some people want that - **help them understand having a home means a yard and yard work.**
- Builders have put sod right on clay - not a good installation. But within a season or 2, this can be corrected through good care. That is a problem with the installation, not an issue with Fescue.

Contact info: grady_miller@ncsu.edu

Info from the program: www.turffiles.ncsu.edu

End of meeting notes from Dr. Miller’s talk and Q&A

Meeting Summary:

Dr. Miller: “There is no perfect grass in this area. NC is traditionally a tall fescue state and it can do well here too.”

There were several homeowners passionately advocating a switch to Zoysia since they believe it to be easier to care for. None advocated for Bermuda.

There were several homeowners passionately advocating not to allow neighbors to install Zoysia or any warm-weather grass since they’ve finally sorted out their fescue and don’t want it invaded.

Next steps:

HOA Board & ARC Committee getting realtor input for property value assessment and cost estimates for changing to Zoysia. A final decision will be in April.