

CLOVER: AN EARTH-KIND ALTERNATIVE TO TURF



Fall is almost here. When the temperature cools a bit, it will be time for many of us to seed our lawns with cool season grasses. Consider adding white clover to your seed mix as an Earth Kind way to help keep your lawn green this fall and winter. It requires less water than fescue and does not need fertilizing. White clover discourages weeds, and it also attracts pollinators at the same time.

Today, many homeowners consider white clover a lawn weed but it was included in many grass seed mixes until the late 1950's when broad leaf herbicides for home use became popular.

White clover is a legume, a plant that converts nitrogen from the air to usable nitrogen in the soil. By adding nitrogen to the soil instead of taking it out, clover improves your soil without adding chemicals. It crowds out weeds that you do not want so you do not need to use herbicides, either. Its roots have a dense

structure that prevents weeds from growing and also helps to stabilize soil making it less likely to wash away during heavy rainstorms.

White clover's deeper roots make it more drought-hardy than most turf grasses. It will stay green in times of moderate drought so you that you do not need to water as often. Dog urine will not dis-color it, thus making it a desirable choice for pet areas. White clover grows slowly on short stems close to the ground, so you do not have to mow it as often.

In Oklahoma, plant white clover in mid-September through October OR mid-February through early April just as you would fescue. Grass seed germinates best when the ground is consistently damp, not soggy so timely and consistent watering is essential. Fall planting offers the best opportunity for good results due to warm soil, moderate air temperatures, and increased precipitation.

White clover will form patches through branching stems that grow along the soil surface and the roots at nodes. It produces flowers from spring to fall, with a peak flowering period in late spring to early summer. These flowers attract pollinators and beneficial parasitoid wasps that kill garden pests (*note: see the above article on veggie pests*). The globe-shaped white "flowers" you see are actually clusters of small blooms that produce seeds, so you do not need to re-seed every spring and fall as you do with fescue.

Consider adding white clover this fall as a minimal maintenance, Earth-Kind addition to your lawn. The pollinators will be glad you did, and you might find a lucky four-leaf clover!



You can get answers to all your gardening questions by calling the Tulsa Master Gardeners Help Line at 918-746-3701 or by emailing us at mg@tulsamastergardeners.org, or come see us at our Diagnostic Center at 4116 E 15th St., Tulsa, OK.

Sources:

Earth-Kind Gardening—a program that encourages non-chemical practices such as cultural, mechanical, botanical, and biological controls for garden pests.

[OSU Extension HLA-6436 Healthy Garden Soils](#)

[OSU Extension EPP-7155 Major Nectar and Pollen Plant Sources of Oklahoma](#)

Lawn and Garden Weeds, Pennsylvania State University Extension Service

University of Missouri Division of Plant Sciences Weed Guide