



Plants & Sport

The people's choice

Grass

Poa spp., Lolium spp., Festuca spp., Agrostis spp.

Why it was chosen

Football, cricket, golf, horseracing, lawn bowls, field athletics, polo and lawn tennis are very different sports, but all depend on one group of plants - the grasses.

Different sports require different types of grass. Compare the fine grass used in crown green bowls with the tough durable grass used on a horseracing track. Most sports surfaces are seeded with a number of different species and varieties and looking after them is a full-time job.

What it is

Lawn grasses belong to the *Poaceae* family which includes bamboo, wheat, sugar cane and rice. Lawns and sports fields are usually a mix of perennial ryegrass (*Lolium spp.*), fescues (*Festuca spp.*), meadow grass (*Poa spp.*), and bent (*Agrostis spp.*).

Where it grows

Grasses are the most widely distributed group of flowering plants, found from the Arctic Circle through the temperate and tropical regions to Antarctica. Some grasses grow in fresh or salt water while a few species even float on the water's surface.

Did you know?

'KEEP OFF THE GRASS'. By walking on grass you can actually change the structure of a lawn. The pressure of our shoes causes the more tender grass species to grow more slowly, with the result that the tougher varieties take over, resulting in a coarser lawn.

What the scientists say

Most other flowering plants grow from cells at the tips of their shoots. All grasses, however, grow from cells at the base of the shoots. That's why grass still grows after we mow the lawn. Scientists are researching how these special groups of cells, called meristems, work, and how they give rise to leaves, stems and flowers. This raises the possibility of modifying the architecture of our crops in the future.