

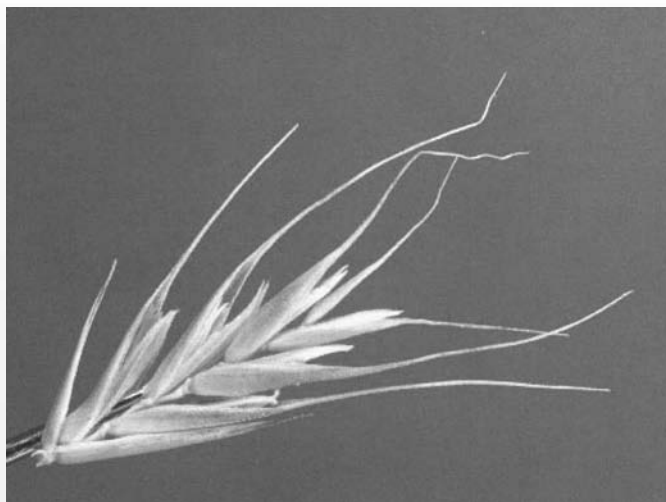
Identifying *Festuca coxii*, a native blue-green grass

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Festuca coxii is widely promoted for garden use as an attractive blue-green ornamental grass. This species, which is closely related to three other species on the mainland, originates from the Chatham Islands. Many gardeners choose this species because it is a native. However, there is often confusion between this species and other blue-green festucas originating from Europe, such as those sold as *Festuca glauca* and *F. cinerea*.

The most obvious, yet simple method to distinguish *F. coxii* from the introduced European blue-green fescues is by the presence of long awns on the lemma. In *F. coxii* the awns are usually 8-10mm long, while in the European fescues they are less than 3mm long, and often absent. In addition, the lemmas of *F. coxii* are abundantly prickly to touch, while European plants are usually smooth. *Festuca coxii* is also noticeably less vigorous, with fewer seedheads (seldom produced until the second or third year) than the European blue-green fescues.

For a detailed description of these and other grasses, refer to E. Edgar & H.E. Connor (2000) *Flora of New Zealand. Volume 5: Grasses* (p.102).



Closeup of the spikelet of *Festuca coxii*, showing awns.



Inflorescence of *Festuca coxii* (top) compared to that of one of the European species (bottom).

Dr Alan Stewart has worked as a plant breeder for Pyne Gould Guinness Seeds for 24 years, operating the only commercial turf breeding programme in New Zealand, and also breeding pasture grasses and forage crop

brassicas. Over 45 commercial cultivars have been released internationally in eight countries. The potential of native grasses for use as turf is a recent interest.

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