Buffalograss wins praise for its low maintenance characteristics, but homeowners still tend to avoid it.

University of Nebraska-Lincoln researchers hope some new varieties in the works will encourage more people to plant the grass.

Bob Shearman, turf scientist in UNL's Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, said 13 new varieties of buffalograss have been developed and some of these may be released as early as 2010. UNL previously developed nine cultivars.

He hopes some of the new varieties will address concerns that buffalograss is too unattractive for residential lawns, he said.

Buffalograss has a more gray-green color and is browner longer than more traditional residential grass like bluegrass and fescue.

"It's not the dark green that most people want," Shearman said. "It's a warm season grass so there's a longer winter dormancy period."

On the positive side, the grass requires much less water and fertilization than other grasses. Buffalograss can grow on one inch of water a month while bluegrass and fescue require four to six inches, Shearman said.

A 1984 agreement between UNL and the U.S. Golf Association led to intensive buffalograss research. The USGA had asked for proposals from universities across the country to find a buffalograss variety it could use at golf courses.

UNL has been a national leader in buffalograss research since its proposal was selected by the USGA. IANR researchers have developed nine cultivars, some of which are planted through seed and some of which are planted vegetatively with sod or plugs.

UNL has licensed the seeded cultivars through Native Turf Group of Murdock and the vegetative varieties through Todd Valley Farms in Mead. The companies have exclusive rights to market and sell the cultivars.

Among the more commonly-used vegetative varieties are Legacy, developed in the last few years, and the more recent Prestige.

Prestige is the first variety that can tolerate a very short cutting height and is extremely resistant to chinch bugs, Shearman said. Legacy occasionally has problems with chinch bugs.

Both Legacy and Prestige are darker green than earlier counterparts, but still are not widely favored for residential lawns.

"It's going to take awhile for grasses like this to have a chunk of the market," he said.

UNL has just put on trial in nine states eight new vegetative types and five new seeded types which promise higher turf quality, Shearman said.