

Zoysiagrass

Zoysia is a type of lawngrass becoming more popular in Florida lawns. It's dark green, and shorter and finer textured than St. Augustinegrass.

Zoysiagrass is adapted to a variety of soils and can have good tolerance to shade, salt, and traffic. It provides a dense, attractive turf. New varieties are being developed for Florida lawns. These grasses grow more slowly and at a lower height than other southern lawngrasses, giving them a thicker, more manicured look.

They require about the same amount of water as other grasses to remain green and healthy, but may need less fertilizer.

Zoysia is a suitable lawngrass for all areas of Florida, and it's typically planted using sod or plugs. There are a few disadvantages, including a slow growth rate and a tendency to produce thatch.



UF/IFAS Publications

Zoysiagrass for Florida Lawns

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Salt-Tolerant Lawn Grasses

Thatch

Salt-tolerant Lawngrasses

In Florida, living near the ocean has its pleasures, but it can be tough on your lawn. There are several types of turfgrass that are salt-tolerant, but the best choices for homeowners are St. Augustinegrass and zoysia. While they can't be irrigated with saltwater, they can handle some salt spray.

While seashore paspalum has excellent salt-tolerance, it requires such a high level of maintenance that it's not recommended for home lawns.

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New and Not So New Lawn Grasses for Florida

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St. Augustinegrass

Zoysiagrass

Other Sites

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St. Augustinegrass

St. Augustinegrass is the most widely planted type of lawn grass in Florida, with green to blue-green color. It's easy and quick to establish the grass from sod or plugs. St. Augustinegrass does require water to stay green during periods of drought, however it doesn't need more water than other grass species to remain green.

It'll also go into winter dormancy in many parts of the state. Reduce watering and don't fertilize in Central or North Florida during the cool months.

Chinch bugs are a major pest of St. Augustinegrass, and can cause a lot of damage. Damaged areas appear as yellow to brown patches, and injury typically occurs first in grass that's water-stressed or in full sun. Chinch bugs are active when it's warm, but may cause damage year-round.



Not all brown grass indicates a chinch bug infestation. If you suspect you have chinch bugs, inspect the border between the brown and green grass for the tiny, black-and-white adults. If you do have chinch bugs, you'll need to devise a plan to get rid of them. Treat with an appropriate pesticide in the spring, or try non-chemical options like reducing thatch or minimizing fertilizer use. You can always consult a pest control professional for help!

UF/IFAS Sites

[Overfertilizing St. Augustinegrass could encourage chinch bugs](#)

UF/IFAS Publications

['Captiva' St. Augustinegrass](#)

[Gray Leafspot of St. Augustinegrass: Cultural and Chemical Management Options](#)

[Growing Turfgrass in the Shade](#)

[St. Augustinegrass for Florida Lawns](#)

[St. Augustinegrass - Made for the Florida Shade?](#)

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[Dollarweed](#)

[Salt-Tolerant Lawn Grasses](#)

[Planting Your Florida Lawn](#)

[Thatch](#)

[Tropical Sod Webworm](#)

Lawns



Lawns not only increase the aesthetic and economic value of the landscape, they also provide space for outdoor activities, aid in erosion control, filter pollutants, and provide oxygen.

Whether starting from seed, sod, or plugs, planting a lawn is a big undertaking, but preparing the site beforehand will make the process go more smoothly.

Different lawngrasses require different levels of maintenance. You should realistically assess how much time, money, and work you can put into maintaining your lawn before you establish it.

Other characteristics of your lawn site are also important, like how much shade the site gets, what its soil type and pH are, how its drainage functions, and what the climate of your area is like.

Consider, too, what you plan to use the lawn for. Is it primarily for aesthetic purposes, or will it receive heavy traffic from usage? Take all of these things into consideration when choosing a turfgrass.

Grasses grown in Florida are maintained in a totally different way from those grown in the northern regions of the United States. Northern-grown grasses (e.g., fescue, bluegrass, ryegrass) will grow in Florida only during fall, winter, and early spring months, and will not survive year-round.

Featured Stories

Right Fertilizer, Right Place

Your Florida Lawn in Winter

Planting Your Florida Lawn

If you're starting from scratch, there are basically two ways to establish a new lawn: with seeds, or with existing grass (in the form of plugs or sod). While starting with seed is significantly less expensive, it can also be more difficult (especially if you're the impatient type). Laying sod, large "sheets" of grass, can give you an instant lawn, but it can be expensive. Your method will also depend on the type of turfgrass you choose, as some types can only be laid as seed, and others only as sod or plugs.

Preparing the Site

Preparing the landscape beforehand will make the process go more smoothly. If you're moving into a new house, remove all construction debris, roots, and rocks from the site. If you're replacing an existing lawn, you'll need to treat the area with a herbicide first and remove the dead vegetation.

It's important to have your soil tested, so that you'll know the pH and nutrient levels. [Your county Extension office](#) can provide you with instructions and the materials to get you started. If necessary, you can add soil amendments and till them in. Finally, be sure the soil is evenly graded and slopes away from the house.

Starting a Lawn with Seed

Seeding is the easiest and cheapest way to establish a new lawn. The best time to seed warm-season grass in most parts of Florida is between April and July, permitting a full growing season before cold weather. Seeding your lawn can be much more cost effective than planting sod, but it depends on which turfgrass you select. Bahiagrass and Bermudagrass are the best choices if you want to start a lawn from seed.

For best results, the site needs to be prepared properly before planting. Make sure you choose high quality seed of a variety appropriate for your area and the site. Remove weeds and vegetation and loosen and level the soil. Work the seed into the soil and cover with sand or another product, such as hay. Seeding rates vary with most species and cultivars of grass. Keep newly seeded areas moist, and apply fertilizer only after the seed begins to grow.

Planting a Lawn with Plugs

Planting a lawn with plugs can be a less expensive alternative to sod, though it doesn't give the "instant lawn" that sod offers.

You can make your own plugs by cutting sod into two to four inch pieces. You can also buy separated plug trays of certain turfgrass varieties. These commercial plugs usually have well-developed root systems, and they're often planted with a special plugging tool.

Plant the plugs into prepared soil on six- to twelve-inch centers, taking care to bury the roots. The farther apart your plugs are, the longer they will take to fill in.

Keep plugs watered on a regular basis and don't mow until firmly rooted. This may take two weeks to a month or more in winter. Don't fertilize new plugs until they've grown together.

Planting a Lawn with Sod

Sodding can give you an "instant lawn," though it's costlier than seeding or plugging.

Start by clearing any debris from the site and leveling the soil. When your sod is delivered, check to see that it's healthy and problem free. Lay your sod within twenty-four hours of delivery, and lightly irrigate the soil just before you begin. Fit the squares tightly against one another in a staggered fashion, cutting them if needed.

Proper watering is essential for your new lawn's survival. Provide light but frequent waterings for the first two to three weeks, so that the soil stays moist but not overly wet. Once the sod is firmly rooted, you can taper off on watering.

Renovating Your Florida Lawn

In the spring, many homeowners begin to think about sprucing up their lawns. Renovation is one way to improve your existing grass without completely removing it and starting over.

Before you start your renovation, consider why your lawn isn't currently thriving. If you don't have the right type of grass for the site conditions, then your grass may suffer again.

Start your renovation by identifying problem areas of your lawn and removing dead or declining patches of turf. Next, use plugs, sprigs, or sod to fill in the holes. Water and fertilize your lawn according to UF/IFAS Extension recommendations, and before you know it, the renovated areas will blend in perfectly with the rest of your lawn.

Repairing the Lawn

Sometimes it's more than just sprucing up; when there are dead areas in your lawn, it's easy to repair them yourself.

Before doing anything, try to determine what killed these areas. Check your irrigation system for missed or overwatered areas, and look for other causes like insects or disease.

To repair patches of turf, you'll need to use either plugs or sod. Plugging is the planting of two- to four-inch circular or block-shaped pieces of sod at six- to twelve-inch intervals. Plugs can be purchased from a garden center or cut from pieces of sod. To fill bare patches immediately, use sod.

Keep your soil moist until the new patches of grass are firmly established, and begin mowing as needed. Wait 30 to 60 days after planting to fertilize your new plugs or sod.

UF/IFAS Publications

[Caring for Flooded Lawns \(PDF\)](#)

[Lawn Problems: Dead or Dying Areas in the Lawn \(PDF\)](#)

[Repairing Lawn Areas \(PDF\)](#)

Best Management Practices for Your Lawn

Easy steps to a beautiful, Florida-Friendly lawn.

Everyone enjoys the look of a nice healthy lawn. Not only do lawns increase the value of a property, they also cool the air, combat glare and noise, and reduce soil erosion. Perhaps most importantly, a healthy lawn actively filters and traps sediments and pollutants that could otherwise contaminate ground and/or surface water.

So how do you get the best possible lawn for your grass species? Follow the simple tips in this fact sheet and your Florida lawn will reward you by resisting diseases and insects, requiring less watering and mowing, and looking great—even during droughts!

BMPs: Your Route to a Healthy Lawn

Best Management Practices (BMPs) are techniques you can use to get the healthiest lawn possible. Following BMPs can save you time and money. They also help to reduce nonpoint source pollution, which is when excess or misapplied fertilizer enters water bodies, causing unhealthy algae growth and contaminating our water supply.

Lawn-care BMPs were developed by the University of Florida, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the pest control and lawn-care industries, and environmental groups. BMPs address every aspect of turfgrass maintenance, from fertilization, irrigation, and mowing, to pest and weed control.

Fertilization

Applying the proper amount of fertilizer will help your lawn resist weed invasion. Improper application—applying fertilizer at the wrong time or applying too much fertilizer—can damage your lawn. Be sure to read the label on the fertilizer bag carefully and refer to [the Florida Lawn Handbook](#) for detailed information.

Fertilize Correctly

Lawns use fertilizer to look their best and stay healthy. But it is critical to fertilize correctly. Not only can improper application hurt your lawn, it can contribute to nonpoint source pollution. Be sure to follow UF guidelines on fertilization, paying special attention to rates and timing. For more information, please refer to EDIS publication EP221, [General Recommendations for Fertilization of Turfgrass on Florida Soils](#).

Fertilizer Components

Fertilizers are composed of three main elements—nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium—but they also contain a variety of other ingredients. It's better to know what your soil really needs before you start spending money on products. A soil test on your property can help determine what, if any, additional nutrients your lawn needs. Contact [your county Extension office](#) for information on how to submit soil samples.

Fertilizers containing slow-release nitrogen are good for both your turf and the environment. Slow-release nitrogen avoids "burning" your turf by releasing too many nutrients at once and provides a nice long-lasting greenup. Products with low or no phosphorous are becoming more readily available, which is good for the Florida homeowner. Many Florida soils are already high in phosphorous and don't need any added.

Good Timing

In South Florida, you can apply fertilizer throughout the year. In North and Central Florida, it's better to fertilize only during the growing season—during the spring, summer, and fall. Lawns in most of the state go dormant during the winter months and should not be fertilized.

Your last fertilizer application should be around the end of September in North Florida and mid-October in Central Florida. Wait until the danger of frost has passed and temperatures are consistently warm before applying fertilizer in the spring.

Application

It's important to use your fertilizer responsibly. When fertilizing near water, leave a 10' strip around the water as a buffer zone. This unfertilized strip will protect the water body from nutrient leaching or runoff from the fertilized grass.

Be sure to keep fertilizers off of paved surfaces. Where fertilizer can't be absorbed, it can easily be washed into storm water drains and from there into water bodies. To prevent this, look for a spreader with a deflector shield. The deflector shield will spread the fertilizer only in a 180° arc, keeping it on the grass and off the pavement.

Storage

Store your unused fertilizer where it will stay dry. Make sure not to store it next to gasoline or chemicals. These might contaminate the fertilizer and make their way into your lawn.

Mowing

Though it may seem like the bane of your existence during the summer months, mowing is actually one of the most important home lawn management practices. It's important to keep up a regular mowing schedule during the summer to maintain your turf's maximum health.

Here are some suggestions to make your mowing life easier:

Mow at the highest recommended height for your grass species.

Bahiagrass: 3.5 - 4"

Centipedegrass: 1 - 2"

St. Augustinegrass: standard cultivars, 3.5 - 4"; semidwarf cultivars, 2 - 2.5"

Zoysiagrass: The majority of these cultivars should be mowed at 1.5-2"

Never remove more than 1/3 of the leaf blade. "Scalping" (mowing too low) can badly stress your turf, leaving it vulnerable to disease, drought, and insect or weed invasion.

Leave grass clippings on the ground. These actually act as compost, returning valuable nutrients to the lawn. They can reduce your fertility requirements and add organic matter to the soil.

Keep mower blades sharp. Dull mowers tear leaf blades, stressing the grass and making it more vulnerable to pests and disease.

Do not mow when your lawn is wet. Wet grass clippings keep your mower blades from making the cleanest possible cut.

If you do happen to miss a weekly mowing, bring the height of the grass back down to the recommended level slowly. Raise the mower height so you don't remove too much leaf tissue at once.

Irrigation

More lawns are damaged by over-watering than by any other cultural practice. Over-watering actually keeps your grass's roots in the top few inches of soil, which reduces your lawn's ability to tolerate stress. A healthy lawn has deep roots. To train your roots to grow more deeply, follow these tips:

Let your lawn tell you when to water. A lawn is ready for watering when it shows at least one of the three signs of lawn thirst:

Folded leaf blades

Blue-gray color

Footprints visible in grass (the grass isn't springing back)

Water less frequently for longer periods of time. Watering less often will encourage your grass's roots to grow deep into the soil. Deep roots help turf survive stresses like drought and traffic. How often to water depends on the season, your soil type, the amount of shade in your yard, and other factors. During times of active growth (spring, summer, and fall), lawns generally need watering once or twice a week. During the winter, you may only need to irrigate every 2-3 weeks (in North Florida). Remember that some of this irrigation will come from rainfall.

Water the proper amount. In most of Florida, this means applying $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{3}{4}$ " of water during a single irrigation session. South Florida's sandy soils may need the $\frac{3}{4}$ " rate, while North Florida's heavier clay soils will probably only need the $\frac{1}{2}$ " rate. Do not water to the point of runoff (excess water that your grass cannot absorb). Because of the differences in irrigation systems, the time required to soak the ground to the proper depth will vary. See below for ways to estimate how long you should be watering. Make sure not to water when rain is forecast in the next 24 hours!

Check your sprinkler system. If you use sprinklers, place straight-sided cans like coffee or tuna cans around the perimeter of your irrigation zone and see how long it takes to fill the cans to $\frac{1}{2}$ or $\frac{3}{4}$ ". This will tell you how long to run your sprinklers for each time. Check your rain sensors frequently to make sure they are functioning correctly.

Irrigate around sunrise. Irrigating in the early morning will allow the leaf blades to fully dry out during the day. Irrigating in the late afternoon or evening leaves the leaf blades wet, which may increase the grass's susceptibility to disease.

Written by:

Georgia Gelmis

Adapted from:

"Homeowner Best Management Practices for the Home Lawn" (Laurie E. Trenholm)

"Weed Management in Home Lawns" (J. Bryan Unruh, Barry Brecke, Laurie E. Trenholm)