

Season's greenings

Now's the time to get most lawn grasses off to a good start

By RICK ROSEN
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When the weather heats up, so does the urge to have a beautiful lawn. And spring through early summer is the time to get that sod or seed down.

Grass really takes off when temperatures are above 70 degrees at night and in the mid-80s to low-90s during the day, says

Dr. Jim McAfee, Texas Cooperative Extension turfgrass specialist. That makes mid- to late-April ideal. Although temperatures aren't that hot yet, it is perfectly OK to get started now.

One exception: Tall fescue is best planted in early fall. When replacing dead grass or laying down a whole new lawn, Extension recommends starting with good, amended soil, at least 6 inches. Once the sod or seed is down, water it immediately, and keep it moist while it is being established.

Here's a look at seven grasses recommended by TAMU for homeowners. The Aggieturf.tamu.edu Web site has many more helpful tips for lawn care.

CHORES



NATALIE CAUDILL/Staff Photographer

St. Augustine grass is good for shady areas.

COMPARING LAWN GRASSES

A quick guide to help choose which turf is right for you:

Grass species	Shade tolerance	Water requirement	Cold tolerance	Traffic tolerance	Disease potential	Establishment rate	Mowing frequency	Mowing height	Leaf texture
St. Augustine	High	Medium	Low	Low	High	Medium-fast	5-7 days	2.5-3.5"	Coarse
Bermuda	Very low	Medium-low	Medium	High	Medium-low	Fast	3-7 days	1-1.5"	Fine
Buffalo	Medium	Very low	High	Medium	Low	Slow	7-14 days	2.5-3"	Fine
Centipede	Medium	Medium	Low-medium	Low	Medium-low	Medium	7-14 days	1.5-2.5"	Coarse
Tall Fescue	High	Medium	High	Medium	Low	Medium-slow	5-7 days	2.5-3"	Medium
Zoysia japonica	Medium-high	Medium	High	High	Medium-low	Slow	7-10 days	1-1.5"	Fine
Zoysia matrella	Medium-high	Medium	High	Medium	Medium-low	Slow	5-7 days	0.5-1"	Fine

Note: According to the Aggieturf.tamu.edu Web site, *Zoysia japonica* is well-adapted for home lawns, while *Zoysia matrella*, which has finer blades, may require more maintenance.

Source: Texas A&M University

SEED IT OR SOD IT?

SEED	SOD
Inexpensive	Expensive
Takes time for seeds to sprout	Instant lawn
More species and cultivar choices	Limited to what's being cultivated locally
Compatible with all soils	Potential for soil incompatibility
Planting times limited	Plant anytime, weather permitting
Not good choice on slopes	Fewer erosion problems
Can dry out quickly	Won't dry out as quickly
Greater chance of weeds	Fewer weeds (if sod high-quality)
No heavy lifting required	More labor-intensive

Source: Lawn Geek by Trey Rogers

Other methods include planting plugs, which are handful-size pieces of sod, 6 to 12 inches apart (cheaper than sod); sprigs, tops and roots that you can plant in furrows or poke into the ground (also inexpensive); hydroseeding, which combines seed, water, fertilizer and mulch into a slurry that you spread over a prepared bed; and strip sodding, essentially putting down strips of sod with space between each strip.

Advice from the Geek

Lawn Geek: Tips and Tricks for the Ultimate Turf From the Guru of Grass, (New American Library, \$15 paperback), is an easy-reading and authoritative book by Trey Rogers, professor of crop and soil sciences at Michigan State University. Some interesting observations and facts from his book:

"The average lawn contains six grass plants to every square inch. If your lawn is eighty-seven-hundred square feet, a fairly typical size, you have close to 7.5 million little plants to tend to."

"The bottom line on zoysia grass and Bermuda grass, if you're trying to choose between them, is that Bermuda grass is going to be a lot easier to establish."

Centipede grass: "This is one of the reasons why it's called lazy man's grass: It will stay kind of green without a lot of care ... bottom line, it's a pretty hardy grass. ... It has short, upward-growing stems that, when coupled with its creeping



growing form, make it resemble a centipede — hence its name."

"Once established, buffalo grass can grow in areas that receive as little as 10 inches of moisture a year. ... If you want a green lawn, buffalo grass might not be for you."

"Here's a pro tip: With warm-season grasses, particularly Bermuda grass, you can save money by cutting your own sprigs or plugs from pieces of sod and spreading them around. It takes some muscle power, but the effort can be worth it if you're on a tight budget."

HOME

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