



“Turf Grass Tips and Maintenance for a Beautiful Lawn”

UF/IFAS Marion County Extension Service

The Foundation for The Gator Nation. An Equal Opportunity Institution.

- Kathleen Patterson, *Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Coordinator*

First ask yourself these questions:

- ❖ What do your deed restrictions or covenants state?
- ❖ How much time am I willing to devote to my lawn?
- ❖ How much money am I willing to spend to maintain my lawn?
- ❖ How much time do you spend away from your home? Snowbird?
- ❖ What level of aesthetics do you require?
 - High - no weeds, no insects, no disease, perfectly manicured \$\$\$ and time
 - Medium - a few weeds, occasional disease/insect problems, a few bare spots \$\$
 - Low - if it's green it's ok-mostly weeds-more natural \$
- ❖ How much of your landscape is turf/lawn?
90% 75% 60% 50%
- ❖ How many square feet of turf grass do you have?

3. Turf grass density varies: High/Zoysia & St. Augustine; Low/Bahia
4. A well-maintained, properly fertilized lawn is your best defense against weeds
5. Weed & Feed Products are not recommended in Florida
6. Any fertilizer that is applied correctly will not result in storm-water runoff or leaching into our drinking water.

Types of Turf

Bahia –

Pros: forms extensive root system, does not require high inputs, Insects-mole crickets, re-seeds

Cons: unsightly seed heads, open growth habit=more weeds, disease-dollar spot

Bermuda –

Pros: used on golf courses, athletic fields, very high maintenance, many insect problems

Cons: can become aggressive, forms excessive thatch, poor to medium cold tolerance, should use reel mower so not recommended for home lawns

Centipede –

Pros: slow growing, low fertility, yellow green in color, low growing

Facts:

1. All turf grass requires sufficient water. Rain water vs. irrigation
2. Turf grass does not do well in heavily shaded areas

Cons: susceptible to nematodes and ground pearls, heavy thatch, centipede grass decline

Ultimate - new UF release, finer texture than Empire, possible nematode damage.

St. Augustine –

Pros: dense turf with good color, excessive thatch with over-fertilization, needs supplemental irrigation.

Cons: poor wear tolerance, may be susceptible to cold damage. Insects-chinch bugs, disease-brown patch and grey leafspot.

Cultivars:

Delmar - semi-dwarf, good shade and cold tolerance

Floritam - poor cold and shade tolerance, most widely used in Florida

Seville – semi-dwarf, cold sensitive, prone to thatch, good shade tolerance

Classic - good cold tolerance, medium shade tolerance

Bitter Blue - good shade and cold tolerance

Sapphire - new cultivar

Captiva - new UF release, good shade tolerance, reduced damage from chinch bugs

Palmetto - shorter leaf blades, good growth habit, does well in full sun/partial shade

Zoysia –

Pros: good tolerance to shade and traffic, very dense, slow growth, reduced mowing

Cons: heavy thatch, should be mowed with a reel mower

Cultivars:

Empire - low growing, dense, holds green color longer than St. Augustine. Poor shade tolerance, hunting billbug pests, susceptible to brown patch, thatch.

Tips for Turfgrass:

- ❖ Complete soil analysis versus pH testing only.
- ❖ Apply 1/2- 3/4 inch of water per irrigation.
- ❖ If you have just fertilized your lawn, apply no more than 1/4 inch of water (3 inch depth if 1'=12")
- ❖ Check irrigation system regularly for water uniformity. Do not mix sprinkler heads or flow rates.
- ❖ Do you know how much water you are applying?
- ❖ Adjust irrigation to the season and rainfall patterns. Summer means increased water use versus decreased water use in winter months, depending on rainfall.
- ❖ Do not water if rainfall is expected in 24 hours or less.
- ❖ Increase mowing heights to develop deeper root system and increased drought tolerance.

**If you have a firm cut your grass they have a tendency to scalp-don't have to mow as often.

Common Mistakes and Misconceptions:

- ❖ Improper timing of application of fertilizers. Avoid applications after September 30 and before March 15.
- ❖ Weed and Feed Products are not recommended in Florida.
- ❖ Pre-Emergents should be applied 4 times per year for optimal weed control.
- ❖ Read labels and apply no more than the rate listed on the label. The label is the law.

- ❖ Atrazine may not be applied with temperatures higher than 80 degrees.
- ❖ Frequent watering results in shallow root systems which are more susceptible to cold damage.
- ❖ We do not need to add Phosphorus in Florida unless a soil analysis has shown a deficiency.

Florida Friendly Landscaping Tips:

- ❖ Enlarge bedded areas
- ❖ Plant deciduous trees on the east and west side of your home for shade and energy savings
- ❖ Install micro-irrigation or drip in landscape beds
- ❖ Mulch with organic products to reduce weeds and water needs
- ❖ Plant some native shrubs and trees to attract wildlife
- ❖ Group plants according to water needs
- ❖ Not all insects are bad
- ❖ Be forgiving of imperfections and this will help to reduce stress levels!

Make a Program and Follow It:

- ❖ Plan your attack for the year
- ❖ Scout regularly, particularly during the summer growing season.
- ❖ Know your problem areas
- ❖ Test your soil ahead of time
- ❖ Time your applications
- ❖ Know when to reapply and how often
- ❖ Ask questions if you don't know
- ❖ Test your soil
- ❖ Know your plants nutritional needs
- ❖ Know when and how much to apply to get the desired results
- ❖ Make the proper application amounts and do it safely
- ❖ Sweep or blow off sidewalks, driveways and streets
- ❖ Water the fertilizer in with no more than ¼ inch of irrigation
- ❖ Keep the environment in mind when using fertilizer, pesticides and water!