Finally, there is a new alternative for your lawns. Seashore paspalum (Paspalum vaginatum), a native to tropical and sub-tropical regions of the world, is a high-quality, environmentally friendly turf grass that tolerates multiple stresses, such as drought and low fertility.

It is becoming more and more popular in the turfgrass industry because of environmental concerns and water limitations. The turf grass of the 21st century must be able to take up and use fertilizers efficiently, resist diseases and insects and tolerate a wide range of water resources.

Seashore paspalum, also known as silt grass or sand knot grass, complies with all of these requirements. It is being used on many athletic fields and golf courses throughout the the South because of these qualities and its excellent wear tolerance. It is now available for home landscaping.

Seashore paspalum has a higher drought resistance than most warm-season grasses when properly managed. It should only be watered on an as-needed basis, when signs of water deficiency are apparent. These include rolling of the leaves, wilting and foot imprints that remain after walking on it.

Proper water management will allow the grass to develop a strong root system and build up its drought tolerance. This new turf grass is very tolerant of saline or recycled water. This gives us more water resources for our lawns, such as ocean saltwater or reclaimed water. It can also endure floods or extended wet periods.

Weeds are less of a problem in seashore paspalum because of high shoot densities. This competitiveness will help keep the use of herbicides to a minimum. If weeds are present, they can be controlled with saltwater. Most grassy and broadleaf weeds are not as salt-tolerant as this turf grass.

Seashore paspalum also has fewer problems with insects and diseases than other turf grasses, which will decrease our usage of pesticides. Low fertility rates do not affect seashore paspalum. This is because it is able to absorb nutrients more efficiently, allowing for less runoff and waste of fertilizer. It also requires less nitrogen than other warm-season grasses. Seashore paspalum can handle a larger range of pH. It can grow in a pH from 4 to 10.

Seashore paspalum can bear extended periods of low light, such as prolonged periods of cloudy or rainy days. However, it will not perform well under tree shade. It also goes off color and into winter dormancy later than other grasses but greens up slightly later.

It grows in dense and requires less mowing. Seashore paspalum can produce thatch in lawns. Thatch is a layer of decomposing and dead leaf blades, stems and roots on top of the soil surface. This occurs when there is excessive nitrogen applied to the turf grass, overwatering or poor mowing practices. Using vertical mowing blades, mulching mowers or proper turfgrass management practices can reduce it.

Because of its tolerance of reclaimed and recycled water, seashore paspalum can be used to clean up polluted water and soil environments. It can also be used as a transition plant into wetlands or other environments to minimize the contamination from industrial sites or other problem areas. It will help control erosion in some areas, too.

With its fine texture, similar to Bermuda grass, it will surely take off in popularity in residential landscapes. Sea Isle I is the cultivar of seashore paspalum currently available in Central Florida. The
University of Georgia released this cultivar in 1999. It produces an excellent lawn with dark green, dense growth.

Seashore paspalum holds many benefits that allow it to be easily managed in order to comply with local, state, and federal regulations concerning environmental issues on water quality and quantity. It can also save money by requiring less fertilizer and pesticide, and that will in turn reduce fertilizer and pesticide runoff into the environment. For a detailed publication on seashore paspalum and to find out where you can purchase it, call the Osceola County Extension Service at (321) 697-3000.

Jennifer Welshans
Horticulture Agent
Osceola County Extension Service
1921 Kissimmee Valley Lane
Kissimmee, FL 34744
321-697-3000
jwel2@osceola.org
osceola.ifas.ufl.edu
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