

Replanting your Florida lawn

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There have been many questions this spring in the Plant Clinic on how to replant a new lawn. If your lawn has seen better days and you are thinking about replanting your lawn, spring is the time to do it. The warm weather will help the lawns to grow and become established at a quicker rate. However, before planting your lawn, you need to select the turfgrass that is best for your situation.

Selecting which type of turfgrass for your lawn should be based on a number of factors including site conditions, level of maintenance, and, of course, personal preference. Although, cost is another factor that may be considered, it should not be the main factor in your decision. St. Augustinegrass (*Stenotaphrum secundatum*), Zoysiagrass (*Zoysia* spp.), and Bahiagrass (*Paspalum notatum*) are the three most popular warm season turfgrasses. They both have their advantages and disadvantages. A close look at these will be needed in order to make a complete, educated decision.

St. Augustinegrass lawns consist of a green to blue-green dense turf that is well adapted to most soils and climatic regions in Florida and certain cultivars possess good shade tolerance. It establishes quickly from sod, which creates an “instant lawn” many homeowners desire. It can also be established by 2-inch plugs that are placed approximately 1-foot apart. This option, of course, will take longer to grow into a full lawn. St. Augustinegrass cannot be successfully established by seed.

Like most turfgrasses, St. Augustinegrass has certain cultural and pest problems. It does not remain green during drought conditions without supplemental irrigation. It produces excessive thatch (layer of organic matter between the soil and turf) under moderate to high fertility and frequent irrigation. It also has poor wear tolerance, making constant activity on the lawn damaging. The major insect pest of St. Augustinegrass is the chinch bug. Some cultivars are also susceptible to gray leaf spot and other diseases.

Zoysia is a type of turfgrass 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 and traffic. It provides a dense, attractive turf. These grasses grow more slowly and at a lower height than other southern turfgrasses, 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 turfgrass 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.

Bahiagrass forms an extensive root system, which makes it one of our most drought-tolerant grasses. It performs well in infertile, sandy soils and does not require high inputs of fertilizers. It does not form excessive thatch. It may be grown from seed, which is abundant and relatively

cheap, or it may be established from sod, sprigs, or plugs. It has relatively few disease problems, and mole crickets are the only primary insect problem.

But Bahiagrass also has its disadvantages. It forms tall seedheads throughout the spring, summer, and fall months. This necessitates mowing on a regular schedule. Because the seed stems are tough, it also makes it more difficult to mow than some other grass species. It does not have good tolerance to shade, traffic, or saltwater. Bahiagrass also displays an open growth habit, which can result in encroachment of weeds into sparse areas. It has a coarse leaf texture and provides less cushioning for recreational activities.

Regardless of which type of turf you choose or the method of planting (seed, sod or plugs), it is essential that the planting site be properly prepared before planting, which includes removing all plant material and roots in the area. Also, remember that a healthy, attractive, long-lived lawn can only be established if you select high quality seed or planting material and select turfgrasses that are well adapted to the site conditions.

Once planted, proper irrigation is essential for the establishment of the lawn. Too much or too little water during this time can be a huge factor in the long-term health of the turf. For more information on how to water during establishment or general lawn care, please contact the Osceola County Master Gardeners at (321) 697-3000. They are available to Monday thru Friday from 9am to 3pm.