



Louisiana Lawns

Fact Sheet

Turfgrass for Louisiana Lawns

Bermuda
Zoysia
Centipede
Carpet
St. Augustine

A lawn can be as functional as it is beautiful if planned properly. Some lawns are planted in problem soil areas or heavy traffic zones, and these need special considerations. Some turfgrasses, like Zoysias, require high maintenance and special equipment to achieve the beauty they are renowned for. To treat these grasses with less care will lead to a decline or disaster. The secret to a beautiful lawn is to consider what you want, what you need and what you are willing to do.

The Turfgrasses

Bermuda grass (wiregrass, couchgrass) makes a fine textured lawn. This grass makes a tough, dense turf with some short and fine seed heads. It requires full sun, fairly high maintenance and fertility or it will thin and become weedy. It is somewhat drought and salt tolerant, especially Tifgreen 328. A Bermuda lawn should be cut with a reel mower, especially if cut below 1 inch.

Hybrid Bermudas are fine textured and make a much better turf. They must be sodded, plugged, sprigged or stolonized. For hybrids, choose TifSport, MS Pride, MS Choice, Tifway 419 (a sturdy variety) or Celebration. All hybrid Bermudas are high maintenance grasses.

Bermuda types established from seed include Arizona common and improved selections of common. For an improved seeded Bermuda, choose Riviera, Jackpot, Savannah, Transcontinental, Shangri-La, Blackjack, Triangle, Sydney, Sultan, Sun Star, SunDevil II, Mirage, Sultan or the cold-tolerant Guymon and Yukon. These selections are a little better than the common type but not nearly as attractive as a hybrid.

Zoysia grasses are fine to medium fine in texture and make the highest quality lawns. They grow slowly and are slow to establish, but they are extremely aggressive and will invade other grass areas. The tendency of this grass to thatch (build up a dead, spongy base) is much greater than that of St. Augustine and Bermuda. The thatching problem often requires replacement of this type of grass after five to seven years because homeowners do not dethatch and maintain a low thatching culture. This is especially true for Zoysia lawns in south Louisiana. Those who grow Zoysia should not grow it in total full sun or under high fertility. It is a high maintenance turf.

Homeowners who plant Zoysia should plan on having a reel mower that will catch grass clippings and rent a vertical mower (dethatcher) once a year. This grass may be a little more practical in extreme north Louisiana where generally lower temperatures will help limit growth. The fine-leaved Emerald hybrid and similar Matrella selection should make the best lawns. The thatch-prone Emerald does have good salt and shade tolerance. Meyer Z52 (japonica) variety is coarser, less shade-tolerant and grows faster than the other two Zoysias. El Toro is similar to Meyer but faster spreading and more stress-tolerant. Palisades, JaMur and Crowne are also good choices.

Centipede grass is medium in texture. The common type is what's normally found. AU Centennial is a dwarf selection with some alkali tolerance. All are salt sensitive and exhibit fair shade tolerance. This grass has a moderate growth and requires less maintenance except for ample irrigation during dry periods. Its sward is medium dense, and seed heads are inconspicuous. Common Centipede can be seeded, but it must be done only on a sandy soil that won't crust. Seed is expensive

and stands are often slow to start, sparse and uneven. Generally it is stripped, plugged or solid sodded. Centipede is presently very popular with homeowners. Tifblair variety has more cold tolerance.

St. Augustine has been the most popular grass in Louisiana although its popularity is decreasing. This grass has the coarsest varieties of lawn grasses. The turf is medium in density, and seed heads are short, thick and inconspicuous. It is not seeded. Maintenance is moderate to high, and some varieties have problems with chinch bugs and a decline virus (SAD). Bitter Blue, Floratine and Common are older varieties of moderate coarseness and moderate to low hardiness. Floratam is a coarser variety with poor shade tolerance, some resistance to SAD and chinch bugs but poor resistance to low temperature. This and several other cold-sensitive varieties not listed should not be planted north of New Orleans. Seville has a much finer texture with SAD resistance and chinch bug tolerance, but also has this cold limitation. A moderately coarse variety called Raleigh shows resistance to cold and SAD. The new Delmar and Palmetto varieties are improved over Raleigh and currently produce the best turf.

Carpetgrass is a moderate quality turfgrass. It is not as coarse as St. Augustine and is slightly coarser than Centipede. Carpet forms a medium dense, centipede-like sod which sends up seed heads in summer. The tall, thin seed stalks require weekly cutting for best appearance. It has some light shade tolerance. With its sensitivity to cold and its tolerance of low fertility and wet soils, it's well suited to the poorly drained areas of south Louisiana that do not have salt problems. Carpet can be sodded or stripped but is easily grown from seed. Choose only common carpetgrass (*Axonopus affinis*).

Degree of Shade

Most southern grasses grow best in full sunlight. None grow in heavy shade. Landscape plans often include shade trees for energy conservation and comfort. This presents a problem for turfgrass growth, especially with the Bermuda grasses. Trees may be thinned or delimited to a height of 6 to 8 feet to let more light beneath them.

Choices for Degrees of Shade				
Full Sun	Light	Moderate	Dense	
Bermuda	Centipede	Centipede	English Ivy	Asian Jasmine
Centipede	St. Augustine	St. Augustine (not Floratam)	Ajuga (Bugleweed)	St. Johnswort (Hypericum)
St. Augustine	Carpet	Zoysia (Emerald-S. La.)	Periwinkle (Vinca)	Aspidistra
Carpet	Zoysia	(Matrella-N. La.)	Pachysandra	Native Ferns
			Liriope	Mulch
			Hosta	Natural
			Monkey Grass	

Other Site Considerations

Turfgrasses planted in Louisiana are usually warm season grasses that thrive in heat and go dormant when the temperatures are lower. Severe cold which occurs often in north Louisiana usually injures or kills the less cold-tolerant grasses of St. Augustine, Carpetgrass and some Bermudas. Late summer maintenance, including low N and high potassium, is important to strengthen the cold tolerance of these grasses.

If irrigation is a real problem, don't plant Carpet or Centipede on sandy soils. The other grasses will also need water but will grow better and show less damage from drought. Those grasses needing the most water will also show the most damage from heavy traffic.

Carpet and Centipede prefer non-saline, acidic soils of low to moderate fertility. High fertility brings about a decline in vigor, and soils with a pH above 6 bring on an increasing paleness which may decrease their appeal. The other grasses prefer a pH of 6 or more, but are less particular. Fertilize all grasses carefully for best appearance and least problems.

Planting and Establishment

A lawn of warm season grass is established by solid sodding, stripping, plugging or sprigging. Some grasses may be seeded. Sprigging or seeding is best done when soils warm to about 70 degrees or more at 2-inch depth. Always choose fresh vegetative material that is alive and free from pests. It may be dormant, but active material is best. Have the soil tested for nutrients at least a month before planting. If it needs fertilizers, it may be easier to apply them while preparing the soil.

Herbicides may be useful at this time. Talk to your county agent about this option. Till or harrow the soil. A fresh seedbed is important for any form of establishment.

Water the prepared area well before you plant. When the soil has dried enough to be in good condition, begin planting.

To sprig Bermuda, Zoysia and St. Augustine grass, plant sprigs or stolons. Tear apart or shred the clumps of stems to get small pieces, each with a few roots. Make a series of small parallel trenches about an inch deep and 10 to 20 inches apart. The closer spacing will give a faster cover but will cost more. Place individual pieces vertically in the trenches, leaving most of the leafy portion above the ground. Firm the soil around the sprigs, and water the sprigged area immediately after planting. Maintain a good moisture supply, especially during the first two weeks.

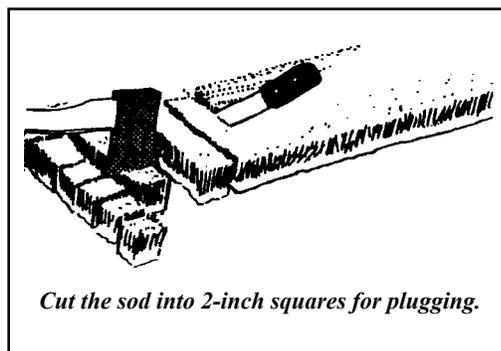
An easier method of establishing the hybrid Bermudas and the Zoysias is to "stolonize" by broadcasting shredded stolons over the surface of the freshly tilled lawn.

First scatter the stolons over the prepared area at the rate of five or six bushels of stolons per 1,000 feet. Use as much as twice that for Zoysia. Firm the stolons against the soil by cultipack or rolling over them with a weighted lawn roller. After rolling, cover the stolons lightly with straw or light mulching material. A 1/4-inch covering of sand is satisfactory for this purpose. Other materials such as peat moss, weed-free topsoil, shredded bagasse and weed-free composted sawdust may also be used at the rate of 1/2-inch cover. Peat moss and shredded bagasse should be wet thoroughly before spreading. After the mulch has been applied, roll again to ensure firm contact between the cover material and the stolons. Water immediately after the second rolling, and maintain a good moisture supply so that the cover material doesn't dry out.

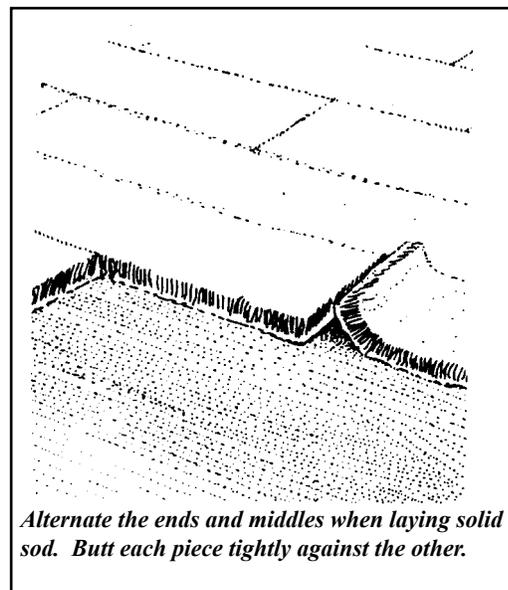
Plugging is commonly used to plant St. Augustine, Centipede and sometimes Zoysia grasses. It may be used satisfactorily, however, with any of the grasses. These grasses should be freshly dug by the nurseryman in blocks of 1/3 to 1 square yard. Soil is left on the root system of the blocks. These blocks are then cut into plugs 2 x 2 inches to 4 inches square. Small holes are dug in the prepared area at regular intervals, usually 10 to 20 inches apart. One of the plugs is placed in each hole. If 4-inch plugs are placed 12 inches apart, then you will need 7 sq. yds. of sod to plant 1,000 sq. ft. For Bermuda and Zoysia, use a 2-inch plug with 10-inch spacing; others, 3 to 4-inch plugs. This will require 4 sq. yds. per thousand. Firm the soil around the plug, then water the entire area.

For sodding or stripping an area, till the soil an inch or two deep and lay sod solidly or in strips. Alternate the ends and middles of sod pieces when laying solid sod. Butt each piece tightly against the others. Use freshly cut sod. Provide good moisture for the first week or two when water is needed.

Carpetgrass and Common Bermuda are established from seed during the late spring through the mid summer months. Hulled Bermuda seed should be used for a fast and more even germination.



Cut the sod into 2-inch squares for plugging.

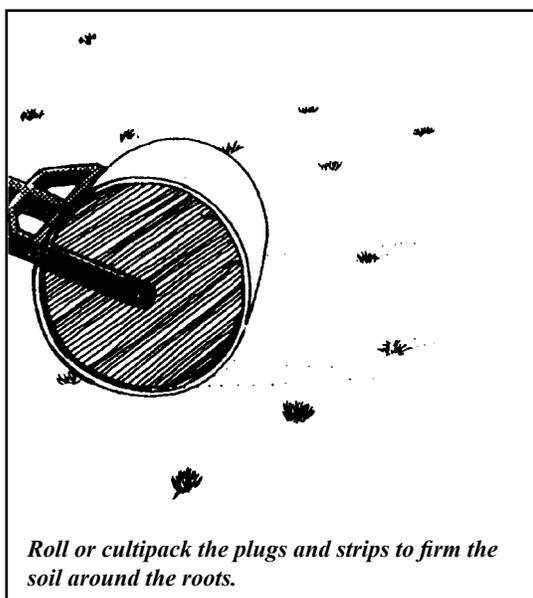


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A firm, well-pulverized, weed-free seed bed is best. Creating a 1 percent slope or slight crown can prevent later drainage problems. If Centipede is to be seeded, be sure the soil is sandy or will not crust; otherwise establish Centipede vegetatively. Small seed can be mixed 50/50 or more with dry sand for easier spreading, or try making a shaker container.

Seeding Rate per 1,000 sq. ft.	
Centipede	1/4 - 1/3 lb.
Bermuda	3/4 - 1 lb. (1 lb. if not hulled)
Carpet	1 - 1 1/2 lbs.

After seeding, cultipack or rake lightly and roll the area well. Regularly moisten the bed with a misty spray of water until the grass is up. Never allow the newly seeded lawn to completely dry out. If you do, the tender seedlings will die. The first month is critical. Beware of uneven watering and erosion that will wash away seed and gouge the landscape. Seeding must be done at least two months before frost. Mow new lawns regularly for weed control and turfgrass spread. Cut at 1 1/2 - 2 inches for the shorter grasses and 3 inches for St. Augustine until desired thickness is achieved, then choose a recommended cutting height.



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Pub. 2230

(6M)

2/07 Rev.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of Congress of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture. The Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service provides equal opportunities in programs and employment.

This material is based upon work supported by the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, under Award No. 2006-41210-03363. All opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the view of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.