Curb appeal&garden

Homeowners struggling with turf: "I should have called you first"

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If you have the facts, growing turfgrass is relatively easy. St. Augustinegrass and bahiagrass are best adapted to our area, and they require full sun. St. Augustinegrass tolerates five to six hours of filtered sunlight (30% max dappled shade), but it struggles with less. Bahiagrass prefers eight hours of full sun; no shade. Consider shade-loving plants in shady spots, not turf. Water, fertilizer and pesticides will not help shaded turf. This is an example of using the wrong plant in the wrong place.

Both grasses should be mowed between 3 and 4 inches high. They should be watered with deep, infrequent irrigation, which promotes deep rooting and healthier plants.

In the dry season, it's common to see symptoms of drought in St. Augustinegrass. Rolled leaf blades, bluish-purple color or foot printing are symptoms of drought. With frequent rain in the summer, healthy turf is unlikely to need supplemental irrigation. Too much water could cause more harm than good. Monitor turf for drought stress and irrigate between 6 p.m. and 8 a.m. with ¾ inch of water per application.

Most counties have water restrictions that limit homeowners to one irrigation event per week. Make the most of it and irrigate appropriately. Bahiagrass is exceptionally drought tolerant. Drought-stressed bahiagrass goes dormant, then greens up quickly with summer rains or irrigation. Again, grass only needs ¾ inch of water per irrigation when it's healthy. Shaded grasses require less water and fertilizer, so more is not better in these cases.

Depending on the system, 10 minutes of irrigation might mean 1/10 of an inch to 2 or more inches of water was applied. Easily calibrate the system by using three tuna cans randomly placed in each irrigation zone, and run the zone for 10 minutes. Using a ruler, measure the amount of water in the cans and take the average of the three. If the amount is more (or less) than the ¾ inch recommended, adjust the timing on that zone. Test each zone, fix broken heads and correct those hitting anything other than turf. Calibrate twice a year to save time and money.

Establish St Augustinegrass, any time of year, using sod. Seed is not an option with this grass. Waiting until the summer rains are frequent can be helpful for establishment. Use the following 30-day sod establishment irrigation routine developed by UF /IFAS, pictured below.

After 30 days, sod will be established (it resists when you tug it), so begin irrigating with ¾ inch of water weekly. Even with irrigation restrictions, it is acceptable to use this routine for the first 30 days. It's critical that

the irrigation system is reset on day 31 to accommodate the restrictions. A functional rain-shutoff device must be in use so irrigation doesn't run during or after a heavy rain event. That's the law.

Bahiagrass can be established through seed or sod with Argentine, best for lawns. Seed at 5 to 10 pounds per 1,000 square feet, and use the same watering schedule. Bahiagrass sod is much quicker than seed and better for small areas. Bahiagrass seed works best with large acreage and/or no irrigation. Bahiagrass thins out over time, so reseeding may be necessary. Weeds can be an issue since bahiagrass grows upright allowing light to hit the ground.

Wait at least 30 days after establishment, for either grass, before fertilizing. Only fertilize turfgrasses when they are actively growing from mid-March through mid-October. Dormant turfgrasses don't take up the nutrients. Fertilizers become pollutants when plants don't use them. Fertilize with one to four pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet (total/year) spread out across two to four applications. The more fertilizer used, the more maintenance required. Both grasses can be maintained and look beautiful with minimal fertilization.

Growing turfgrass doesn't have to waste your time, your money or your sanity. Call your local University of Florida/IFAS Extension Office for more information.

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30-DAY SOD ESTABLISHMENT IRRIGATION ROUTINE

Day	# of Cycles	Run Time (fixed spray)	Run Time (rotors)	Time of Day
Day 1	3 times/day	6 minutes	18 minutes	Upon Installation
My start date:	*Water 3 times on the first day at 6 hour intervals.* *1st application occurs immediately following sod installation.*			
Days 2 - 10	2 times/day	8 minutes	24 minutes	Before 8 a.m. and after 6 p.m.
My day 10:	*Increase run time as indicated* *Water 2 times per day in the morning and the evening at 12 hour intervals.*			
Days 11 - 15	1 time/day	16 minutes	48 minutes	Before 8 a.m. or after 6 p.m.
My day 15:	*Increase run time as indicated.* *Water 1 time per day, in morning or evening.*			
Days 16 - 30	1 time/day	20 minutes	60 minutes	Before 8 a.m. or after 6 p.m.
My day 30:	*Increase run time as indicated.* *Water 1 time per day, in morning or evening.*			
Day 31	*Water up to three weekly, by address, before 8 a.m. or after 6 p.m.*			

Timely Tendings

Lawn maintenance

A good lawn maintenance program includes proper mowing, watering, and pest management. With our water restrictions, be sure that your sprinkling system is calibrated to deliver ½-¾ inch of water each time you water. http://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/care/irrigation/calibrating-your-irrigation-system.html. Turf grass should be mowed at the proper height for the variety to encourage deep roots that increase drought tolerance. Mow often enough so that no more than 1/3 of the leaf surface is removed. A sharp-bladed mower is a necessity to ensure a clean cut, which avoids leaf blade damage by tearing the grass tips. Consider using an electric mower to reduce harmful emissions. (See mowing height side bar at the end of this article.)

If you need to fertilize your St. Augustine lawn this month, please note that University of Florida research shows that repeatedly using large amounts of water-soluble nitrogen fertilizer can encourage a population explosion of Southern chinch bugs. Chinch bugs are the number-one insect pest of St. Augustinegrass, the state's most popular lawn grass.

UF turfgrass experts advise homeowners to use no more than 1 pound of slow-release nitrogen fertilizer per 1,000 square feet of lawn. For more information about Southern chinch bugs, visit http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/IN/IN38300.pdf.

Proper Grass Mowing Heights

St Augustine (Floritam)	**3½ - 4 inches**
Dwarf St. Augustino (Seville, Captiva, Delmar)	**2½ - 3 inches**
Bahia	**3 - 4 inches**
Zoysia	**2 - 2½ inches**
Bermuda	**½ - 1½ inches**
Centipede	**1¼ - 2 inches**

Source: Theresa Badurek, Urban Horticulture Extension Agent, UF/IFAS Pinellas County Extension Service. For additional landscape and garden information, visit our website at http://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/pinellas/. Join us on Facebook to get regular tips and information: https://www.facebook.com/PinellasExtension.

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