Bahiagrass Seed Information

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Bahiagrass (Paspalum notatum Flugge)

was introduced from Brazil in 1914. It was originally used as a pasture grass on the sandy soils of the southeastern United States. Additional varieties have been introduced since that time for use as lawngrasses. Bahiagrass is a popular low-maintenance lawngrass for infertile soils. Although bahiagrass does not produce a high-quality, dense, dark green lawn like some other warm-season lawngrasses, it does provide a good low-maintenance lawn where slightly reduced visual quality is acceptable.

Bahiagrass

is drought resistant turf. It does well in lawns and along highways, and its best used in sunny areas in warm humid regions. Its roots extend to 8 feet deep.

In Florida, bahiagrass survives in level areas with no irrigation, but often fails on sandy embankments. It can also be ruined by excess watering, when none is required, and by excess fertilization. Bahiagrass normally goes semidormant during winter, yet people sometimes fertilize and water it to keep it green in winter, and thereby encourage weed populations. There are no postemergence herbicides for grassy weeds in bahiagrass, which is a problem. Most weed problems in bahiagrass could be avoided by proper seed establishment and timely mowing. The large state agencies responsible for maintenance of utility turf struggle to find funds to keep bahiagrass mown properly. In summer its rapid vertical growth and exuberant seedhead production are remarkable. The Argentine variety of bahiagrass is superior to Pensacola for use as turf in south Florida. It has a more abundant root system and is lower growing than Pensacola. Unfortunately, Argentine winterkills more readily than Pensacola, thus Pensacola is more often used in southeastern United States other than Florida. For most turf purposes, seed should be planted in the spring at about 100 pounds per acre in clean seedbeds, incorporated 1/4 to 1/2 inch deep (6 to 12 mm) deep, and pressed in. Straw mulch is helpful, cast on the surface at 2 tons per acre and lightly disked in. In Florida, no irrigation is need to bring the seedlings out of the ground. Fertilization should be postponed until about the 5th week after planting, or after seedlings have begun to tiller, and have adventitious roots. Soon, within 2 months after planting, or whenever weeds have begun to be competitive, the area should be mown.

Advantages

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.

Disadvantages

Bahiagrass forms tall, unsightly 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. Bahiagrass does not perform well in high-pH soils and is susceptible to mole crickets. It does not have good tolerance to shade, traffic, or saltwater. With the exception of Pensacola bahiagrass, there is little tolerance for cold temperatures in this species. Leaves of bahiagrass may tend to turn yellow as a result of iron deficiency. This deficiency can be alleviated by modification of soil pH or application of iron fertilizer. For more information on iron deficiency, please refer to "Fertilization" in this publication. Bahiagrass displays an open growth habit, which can result in encroachment of weeds into sparse areas. In addition, bahiagrass has a low tolerance for many herbicides, making chemical weed control difficult. It has a coarse leaf texture and provides less cushioning for recreational activities than some other species.

Varieties

There are four cultivars of bahiagrass available for home lawn or utility use. These may all be established by seed or sod.

Common

Common Bahiagrass is a coarse-textured, light-colored bahiagrass. It has an open and sparse growth habit and is very susceptible to cold temperatures. It is not normally recommended for use as a lawngrass.

Argentine

Argentine forms a relatively dense sod and has a dark green color, making it acceptable for lawn use in many situations. It has wider leaf blades than Pensacola bahiagrass. It has good insect and disease resistance and tolerates cold temperatures well.

Pensacola

Pensacola bahiagrass was selected in Pensacola, Florida in 1935 and is the most widely grown bahiagrass today. It has an extensive root system, which imparts excellent drought tolerance. It also tolerates either hot or cold temperatures well. It produces an abundance of seedheads, which reduces its desirability for use as a lawngrass, but makes it suitable for roadside plantings. It has longer and narrower leaf blades than Argentine.

Paraguay

This cultivar is also known as Texas bahiagrass. It has short, tough, hairy leaves that have a grayish tint to them. It does not have good cold tolerance and is susceptible to dollar spot disease. It does not perform as well in the lawn as Argentine or Pensacola.

Watering

Irrigating as needed is the best way to water any established, mature grass, as long as the proper amount of water is applied when needed. Irrigation is needed when leaf blades begin to fold up, wilt, or turn blue-gray in color, or when footprints remain visible after walking on the grass. Apply ¾ to 1 inch of water per application. This will apply water to roughly the top 8 inches of soil, where the majority of the roots are. To determine the amount of irrigation supplied by a sprinkler system, place several coffee cans throughout the irrigation zones to find out how long it takes to apply the recommended amount of water. During prolonged droughts, irrigation may be needed more often. Bahiagrass has the best drought tolerance of all lawngrasses grown in Florida and will usually recover from severe drought injury soon after rain or irrigation. It is very important not to overwater Bahiagrass lawns as this weakens the turf and encourages weeds. During extended periods of drought, bahiagrass may go dormant if left without irrigation. The grass will turn brown and stop growing during this dormant period, but will revive and resume growth upon regular application of water. Refer to the Edis publication LH025 , "Watering Your Florida Lawn," for additional information.

Pest Problems

Although bahiagrass is generally less troubled by insects, diseases, and nematodes than other Florida lawngrasses, it is still not completely pest-free. Following are some of the major problems encountered in a bahiagrass lawn. For more information on turfgrass pests and their control, refer to Edis publication LH080 , "Integrated Pest Management Strategies," or purchase a copy of the Florida Lawn Handbook, SP-45, at your county extension office.

Weed Control

The best method of weed control is to maintain a healthy, vigorous turf. Following UF/IFAS recommendations for fertility, irrigation, and mowing will ensure a healthy lawn that is able to out-compete most weeds. Nevertheless, the following chemical treatments may be used on bahiagrass for weed control when needed.

Preemergence herbicides are used before a weed germinates and grows. Preemergence chemicals inhibit germination or form a barrier at the soil line to inhibit weed growth after germination. To effectively use preemergence chemicals, knowledge of weed problems from the previous year is needed. To control areas where crabgrass, sandbur, annual bluegrass, goosegrass, or crowfootgrass have been problems in previous years, apply benefin, bensulide, prodiamine, dithiopyr, pendimethalin, oryzalin, or dacthal prior to their germination. Timing of application is important for successful control. As a general rule of thumb, apply February 1 in South Florida, February 15 in Central Florida, and March 1 in North Florida.

Note: Many popular "weed-n-feed" type fertilizers for home lawns contain the herbicide atrazine. Atrazine will result in some damage to bahiagrass; therefore, it is not recommended for use on this grass.

Insects

The most serious insect threat to bahiagrass is the mole cricket. These insects burrow though the soil and damage roots, causing rapid wilting of the grass. Check for mole crickets by: (1) looking for their tunneling and mounds; or (2) applying 2 gallons of water with 1 to 2 ounces of detergent soap per 2 square feet of turf in suspected damaged areas. If present, the mole crickets will surface in a few minutes. Recently, several bait-type insecticides have been introduced and show real promise as a control measure. However, insecticides available for mole crickets are constantly changing. Check with your county Cooperative Extension Service office for the latest control recommendations.

Diseases

The only serious disease of bahiagrass is dollar spot. This is expressed as spots several inches in diameter scattered across the turf. A light application of nitrogen (½ pound nitrogen per 1000 square feet) should encourage the grass to outgrow these symptoms. If nitrogen application does not provide satisfactory results, refer to the Edis publication LH045 , "Dollar Spot," for more information.

Nematodes

Nematodes are not typically as damaging to bahiagrass as to other species. Because of bahiagrass's deep, extensive root system, nematode damage seldom becomes noticeable. However, if grass becomes thin, grows less vigorously, and develops a weak root system, nematode presence should be suspected. Take a representative soil sample to your county Cooperative Extension Service office to be analyzed, and if nematodes are found, ask for control recommendations. Proper cultural factors to encourage bahiagrass root growth will lessen nematode stress. These include applying less nitrogen, providing less frequent but deep watering, and ensuring ample soil potassium and phosphorus. Please refer to the Edis publication NG039 , "Nematode Management in Florida Lawns," for additional information.

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