

Starting a Bahiagrass Lawn

By Jane Morse, University of Florida/IFAS Pinellas County Extension Agent



Some of the advantages of a bahiagrass lawn are drought tolerance, low fertility requirements, relatively few disease problems and only one primary insect problem (mole crickets). Disadvantages include tall seedheads that some people find unsightly, not much tolerance to shade, traffic or saltwater, and lower performance in alkaline soils.

There are four varieties of bahiagrass available for home lawns. These varieties are Common, Argentine, Pensacola and Paraguay. All of these may be established by seed or sod. Only two of these four varieties are best suited for lawns.

Argentine is relatively dense with a dark green color. It has good insect and disease resistance and tolerates cold temperatures well. Pensacola has excellent drought tolerance and tolerates either hot or cold temperatures well, but it produces an abundance of seedheads.

The best time to establish bahiagrass is during the spring or early summer months. This timing allows the grass to become established before the cooler months arrive and growth is reduced.

Properly preparing the soil before planting is critical. This should be done whether you are planting a new lawn or replanting an old one, and whether you are seeding or sodding. The first step is to remove any debris, brush, large roots, rocks, weeds or old tree stumps. Rough grade the site so it is sloped at 1 to 2 % away from the house (1/2 to 1 foot fall per 50 feet). Poorly drained soil may require installation of drainage lines. If an area cannot be leveled, use groundcover plants other than turfgrass. Control of perennial weeds such as Bermudagrass and torpedograss needs to be done during site preparation. Several applications of a nonselective herbicide are usually required to get rid of these tenacious weeds.

It's always a good idea to have a soil analysis done whenever planting is undertaken. This will provide you with information about the soil including its pH (acidity or alkalinity). Depending on which soil analysis is done, it can also provide information about the fertility of the soil and pH adjustments that may be required. To obtain a soil sample, collect several small plugs from the top 6 inches of the soil in the area to be planted. Throw all the samples together, mix them up, then take at least a cup's worth to be analyzed. Analysis can be provided by Pinellas County Extension. Extension can also provide the mailing materials for a more in-depth analysis done by the University of Florida.

Next, install irrigation equipment if desired. Add any desired soil amendments. Just make sure that all organic soil amendment materials are sterilized to prevent the introduction of weed seeds. Rototill to

loosen compacted soil and improve the speed and depth of rooting. If soil amendments, lime or fertilizer have been added, till the soil deeply down to about 6 or 8 inches.

Finally, do a final grading just prior to planting to provide a smooth planting bed. The site can be hand-raked and dragged with a hand-pulled drag. Large areas can be smoothed by tractor-drawn equipment with a tiller rake or grading box and then hand-finished. Irrigation can be used to settle the soil before planting. Hand-rake to break up a crusty surface prior to seeding.

Seeding or sodding are the next step and these are covered in the publication “Establishing Your Florida Lawn” found at this weblink: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/lh013> or by calling the Pinellas County Extension Service (727-582-2110) and requesting this publication.

Information for this article came from University of Florida publications: “Bahia grass for Florida Lawns” and “Preparing to Plant a Florida Lawn.”

Picture provided by Doris Heitzmann.

Member-Pinellas Partnership for a Drug Free Workplace

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. For more information on obtaining other extension publications, contact your county Cooperative Extension service. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A. & M. University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating. Larry Arrington, Dean.

Any trade names mentioned in the publication are provided solely for informational purposes. The Pinellas county Extension does not endorse or guarantee the standard of the product, nor does it wish to discriminate against any products of a similar nature.

"If you are a person with a disability who needs any accommodation in order to participate in this proceeding, you are entitled, at no cost to you to the provision of certain assistance. With two (2) working days of your receipt of this newsletter please contact the Office of Human Rights, 400 S. Ft. Harrison Ave., Ste. 300, Clearwater, FL. 33756. (727) 464-4062 (Voice/TDD)