

Fundamentals of St. Augustine Lawns

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St Augustine lawns are far and away the most popular in our area. The wide blades, dark color, and shade tolerance make it a good selection for our area. Below we'll hit the high points and Tuesday, May 15 at 6:30 pm, we'll go into more details at a lawn care workshop.

St. Augustine is primarily of tropical origin and still today is restricted to areas with mild winter temperatures. Like Bermuda grass, St. Augustine thrives in high temperatures, but the growth of St. Augustine is better than that of Bermuda grass in coastal climates.

The grass is best adapted to moist, coastal areas with mild winter temperatures. While it is known to be tolerant of high summer temperatures, it also retains its color at temperatures as much as 10° lower than those which discolor Bermuda grass.

St. Augustine grass tolerates moderate shade, being as good, or better than, other warm season grasses for shaded sites. However, under densely shaded conditions, it develops thin, spindly turf.

So long as fertility and drainage are adequate, St. Augustine grass tolerates a wide range of soil types, but does not tolerate traffic as well as some other warm season species.

As long as St. Augustine grass has been cultivated, it has been propagated by vegetative means -- stolons, plugs or sod. Only recently has the seed production potential of this grass been realized; but, as yet, significant use has not been made of that potential.

The success of St. Augustine grass as a lawn grass depends largely on management. Mowing, fertilization and supplemental watering are required to maintain a dense, green, weed-free turf of St. Augustine grass.

The growth rate is dependent on temperature, moisture availability and nutrient availability. Any one of these factors can limit the rate of growth of this species.

Mowing heights may range from 1 to 3 inches depending on the frequency of mowing and the degree of shade present.

Several insect pests cause serious damage. The Southern lawn chinch bug is the most serious pest on St. Augustine along with St Augustine Decline, brown patch and white

grub.

The chinch bug damages St. Augustine grass by feeding on the stems at the base of the leaf sheath.

White grubs are also a serious pest. The grubs are the larvae of the May beetle or June bug that develop in the summer and fall just below the soil surface. The grubs feed on roots of St. Augustine grass and cause significant losses of turf during some years. Damage usually appears the following year as dead areas of grass that can be easily lifted from the lawn.

Grub control is difficult since the larvae are often quite large when detected and feed below the soil surface. Also, for them to be effective, insecticides must be drenched into the soil where the insects feed. Since some insecticides are tightly bound to the thatch layer of St. Augustine grass, drenching the material into the soil is difficult.

Timely and proper application of insecticides is the only method of controlling white grubs. Since they are only an occasional problem, inspection of the turf in midsummer is required for effective control.

St. Augustine grass is susceptible to a number of turf grass diseases and can be controlled by good management and fungicides.

As noted above, a healthy lawn effectively crowds out most weeds. But St. Augustine grass that is not properly maintained or is weakened by insects or disease can be invaded by grassy and broadleaved weeds.

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