



Lush Green Lawns

in the Lowcountry

story and photos by
Lee Edwards



Your new home is under way in the Lowcountry, now what about the yard?

If you're envisioning a year round lush green lawn for your dream home, talking with a landscape expert from this area about the right type of grass will be important. Warm season turfs can be more problematic than what you may have experienced in other regions of the U.S. and the factors involve climate, soil conditions, shade tolerance and maintenance.

Grass needs as much full sun as possible, so one of the first steps to planning will be an assessment of trees and shade in your yard. Landscape consultants will quickly tell you that the best advice is "try to work with what Mother Nature has already provided to grow a nice turf." Assessing your yard conditions to learn what grasses are grown successfully in our region will be a tremendous help to you.

Locally, there are 4 types of grasses that are primarily used for lawns and grounds that grow well and they come in many varieties. Additionally, there is a new turf worth noting for the area. Below is a brief overview of each.

Centipede

Centipede is one of the predominant grasses for lawns in our area. It is the most affordable to install and to maintain. Centipede is a low, medium textured, slow growing, but aggressive grass that can produce a dense, attractive, weed free turf. Centipede is not the most shade friendly turf, but can tolerate some partial shade. Low maintenance requirements and less chemical fertilization make it a popular choice. It has few serious pest problems, it adapts to sandy soils and is

fairly drought tolerant.

What's the disadvantage of Centipede? It does not have a rich lush green color that people often desire. The color is more of a yellowish green and it will go dormant in the winter turning to brown. Also, it does not handle overseeding with rye grass in winter months. It is recommended to apply select insecticides during mid summer months to keep consistent turf conditions.

St. Augustine

St. Augustine is often the most popular choice for lawns throughout the Lowcountry. It grows well in coastal regions, thrives in heat and is excellent to fair in drought conditions. St. Augustine is the most shade tolerant of all the grasses that grow in our area.





Decide what grass will grow best in your yard by first assessing what Mother Nature has naturally provided.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP Palmetto Bluff is planted with Empire Zoysia, a grass that requires frequent watering. Hilton Head has a lush mixture of green grasses, palmetto and dense foliage. St. Augustine is a popular choice for lawns in the low-country because it thrives well in coastal regions.



If you have a thick canopy of trees, this is the type of grass to attempt for a lawn. It has an attractive green color and forms a deep, fairly dense turf. Along the coast this grass has been known to keep select green color during the mild winters.

The down side of St. Augustine grass relates to maintenance. It requires frequent watering, mowing and fertilizing. Some people don't like the look of this thick bladed grass. St. Augustine is mowed at a higher height of 2 ½" compared to Centipede at 2". St. Augustine can also have fungal issues.

Bermuda

Another warm season grass is Bermuda which is seen mainly on golf courses and sports fields. This grass has a fine texture that tolerates traffic and produces a rich green carpet look. It is vigorous and tolerates drought and salt. Bermuda requires full sun to thrive. When Bermuda turf gets damaged it can be easily repaired through aggressive horticulture practices.

Bermuda turf does not do well in the shade and it tends to build up thatch. It is expensive to maintain. Most residential areas in the lowcountry do not use

Bermuda because of its high maintenance requirements including high fertilizer demands and mowing frequency. In the summer, yards may have to be mowed as often as twice a week. It can also be prone to fungus and insects.

Zoysia

Zoysia is a beautiful eco-friendly grass. It is resistant to insects, disease, and weeds. It tolerates heat and can handle foot traffic. Zoysia is compact with a fine, thin blade providing more of a carpet look to the lawn, similar to Bermuda. It is soft to the touch and considered safe for families and pets since it requires little chemical treatments. Locally, there are 4 varieties of Zoysia in use. They include El Toro, Zeon, Emerald, and Empire. It is more shade tolerant, fairly salt tolerant and mowing frequency is less than Bermuda.

Zoysia does better with frequent watering. Locally, the world class resort of Palmetto Bluff enjoys green lawns planted with Empire Zoysia. The potential downside would be color in the winter months. It will turn a golden brown after the first cold snap, and is often the last turf type to start the green up process in spring.

Seashore Paspalum

One of the newest varieties of grass worth noting for our area is the salt tolerant paspalum. This grass is perfect for beach homes – for lawns



near coastal areas where ocean sea spray or salt water flooding takes place. It is a very salt tolerant grass with desirable turfgrass characteristics. It requires moderate amounts of water and fertilizer and needs frequent mowing to maintain a low cut. It has a high tolerance for heat and can also tolerate moderate traffic. You can actually pump salt water on this grass for watering and this will also kill weeds and the bugs.

What's the downside? It is expensive and at this time cost prohibitive for most residential needs.

Finally, some crucial reminders about growing turf in our area. Most southern lawns will need to be sodded instead of seeded. Sodding will give you the instant "wow" effect and it will produce healthier, thicker grass faster than a seeding method. Another important fact, all warm season turf regardless of the variety prefers at least 6 hours of full sun, in order to have a nice appearance. The more sun, the better for grass.

Though, green, weed free lawns are desired and they should be as beautiful as the home you're building, an assessment of what Mother Nature has already provided you will be important for a thorough understanding of the conditions of your yard today and even 3 to 4 years from now.