

SELECTING GRASS IN SOUTH FLORIDA

Well-tended lawns along residential streets are classics of the American landscape. Grass is typically used to cover large expanses of ground. But there is a growing trend to reduce turf areas for easier, less costly maintenance and to achieve energy and water conservation. In a well-designed landscape, the grassy areas provide a floor canvas for the rest of the garden.

Grasses that grow successfully in Florida include: Bahiagrass (*Paspalum notatum* Flugge), Bermudagrass (*Cynodon* species), Carpetgrass (*Axonopus affinis* or *Axonopus compressus*), Centipedegrass (*Eremochloa ophiuroides* (Munro) Hack.), St. Augustinegrass (*Stenotaphrum secundatum* (Walt.) Kuntze.) and Zoysiagrass (*Zoysia* spp.).

The Broward County Extension Service recommends St. Augustinegrass and Bahiagrass for South Florida urban lawns because they are best adapted to our soil conditions, pest and other environmental factors. A third consideration is Zoysiagrass.

St. Augustine - This variety grows best in well-drained, fertile soils. Its dark green, dense turf, salt and shade tolerance, as well as its quick and easy establishment from sod, make it a popular choice. However, it has some disadvantages. It is a water guzzler and is susceptible to cinch bugs.

Bahia - This lawn grass can be grown from inexpensive seed, is drought tolerant and has few pest problems. It is vulnerable to iron deficiency in spring and fall but can be treated with ferrous sulfate (liquid iron) to promote green growth. The biggest problem with Bahia is its tall, unsightly seedheads, which require weekly mowing to control.

Zoysia - For top quality lawns, where time and money allow an adequate maintenance program, Zoysiagrass is an excellent choice. The density of this grass reduces weed invasion and produces a carpet-like turf that has good tolerance to drought, shade and salt spray.

Zoysia is an ideal choice for clients who want to use hardscape materials and grass flooring to define outdoor living spaces or highlight special features of their garden. Consider Zoysiagrass in between stepping stones. For larger areas, fast-spreading "Emerald" Zoysia works well. To create a dense, soft-weave carpet in smaller areas, consider "Cashmere" or "Empress" Zoysia. These varieties are best cared for with a reel lawnmower.

