

REPAIRING OR REPLACING YOUR LAWN, FLORIDA FRIENDLY

You are faced with repairing or replacing your lawn, and you do not want to water grass throughout the long dry seasons. There are three Florida Friendly turf grasses, Bahia, Bermuda and Zoysia, that require little or no watering after they are established. All turf grasses however, whether from sod, plugs or seed, require watering until they are established. Sarasota County allows this. You may water any day for 15 days and every other day for the next 15 days. After that you may water once a week.

Bermuda is so well adapted to our area that it readily spreads, even to your neighbor's yard, but it does not tolerate shade and is subject to nematode damage. It may be obtained as seed from Lowes or Home Depot, as variety "Celebration" plugs ordered from Lowes, or as sod ordered from landscapers or lawn and garden outlets.

Bahia is very drought tolerant and goes dormant (brown) during the dry season. It is relatively pest-free but it tends to thin with time. Because it is acid-loving, it requires applications of "Ironite" twice a year. It is not shade tolerant. Seed is available at lawn and garden outlets. Sod may be ordered from landscapers or lawn and garden outlets.

Zoysia is very drought tolerant and forms a smooth carpet-like lawn that goes dormant during the dry season. It is somewhat shade tolerant, but slow growing and subject to nematode damage. Plugs may be obtained from Home Depot. Sod may be ordered from landscapers or lawn and garden outlets

Preparation and Planting. Seed is cheapest with the lowest chance of success. Sod is most expensive with the greatest chance of success. Plugs are labor-intensive but cost effective.

The best time to replace or repair a lawn is June, during the start of the rainy season

If you are doing a large area, first kill all existing plants with glyphosphate ("Round Up"). Be sure to do this before the crabgrass has produced seed. (Round Up does not kill seed.) Rake up dead plants. Wait two weeks before sowing the new seed. If you have time, you can kill crabgrass seed with "Crab Grass Preventer", but you must wait four months before seeding your lawn. Rake in seed thoroughly and evenly.

If installing sod, the soil should be tilled and leveled. Sandy soil low in organic matter should be amended with composted manure or similar product. Composted manure can be put directly in plug holes. Put down lawn starter fertilizer on the soil according to instructions on the bag.

Bermuda and Bahia lawns that are thin can be over-seeded to thicken them. First rake up dead debris.

Watering. Seeded areas should be watered twice a day until plants begin to grow; this may take two weeks. Then gradually decrease watering frequency. Water deeply to encourage root growth.

Sod and plugs should be watered daily until firmly rooted (cannot be gently lifted). Then gradually decrease watering frequency. Water deeply.

Fertilizer. Apply turf fertilizer twice a year, watering it in.