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Give Your Bermuda a Rest

By Bill Jernigan, ACLP, East Valley Area Manager

Overseeding our Bermuda lawns here in the desert southwest has become a standard landscape practice of ensuring year-long green grass. Because most people come to expect overseeding, many of the negative aspects of overseeding get overlooked.

Typically, overseeding starts in mid September when Bermuda grass is actively growing. At that time, a combination of lowered cutting height, lowered irrigation amount and in some cases chemicals are used to slow the growth of the Bermuda. The Bermuda is then "scalped" to remove most of the green grass and allow the ryegrass time to become established. The Bermuda is then forced to compete for water, nutrients and sun with the newly planted rye grass.

The results in the Bermuda grass being in a weaker health condition when entering winter dormancy in November. The following Spring, still lacking energy from dormancy and again competing with the rye grass, the Bermuda now has difficulty re-establishing itself. The Bermuda will continue to struggle until the rye has died when temperatures reach 100 degrees. This can be a large contributing factor to Bermuda turf decline.

This whole process means that the normal growing season for Bermuda of April through November (8 months +/- depending upon weather conditions) is now reduced to June through September, just 4 - 5 months. This is not nearly enough time to provide for a healthy and vigorous stand of Bermuda grass in the summer months.

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This is an example of Bermuda Turf that is in a declined state. Turf is lacking Bermuda after Rye grass has died and typically may contain weeds, especially Spurge. This problem doesn't normally occur quickly, but normally takes a few years to occur. Utilizing proper turf management practices (fertilization, soil amendments, aeration, proper mowing and allowing Bermuda to rest every few years) along with proper irrigation practices should allow these areas to fully recover.



Rye grass which has been overseeded at a higher than acceptable rate can multiply the negative affects to the Bermuda grass which is extremely noticeable at transition time. This turf was seeded at a rate of 8 pounds of Rye seed per 1000 square feet which helps to reduce the amount of competition as the Bermuda starts to grow in the Spring.

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Weed Control, Pre-emergent

With the expectation of our summer storm season, now is one of the best times to apply pre-emergent herbicide. Pre-emergent herbicide should be applied to the landscaped areas where you wish to prevent and control the growth of weeds. Timing of the application is very important. It requires water to leach the herbicide into the soil where the weed seed is residing. Once the pre-emergent herbicide is absorbed into the soil, it will help deter the germination of most weeds. It is important not to disturb the area where you have applied pre-emergent. The more activity in the area will only break the barrier that you are trying to create with the pre-emergent, and weeds would have a better chance of growing.

An important factor when choosing a pre-emergent herbicide is to determine what type of weeds you have had in the past and selecting a product that targets that type of weed. With proper planning and good timing you can have a successful pre-emergent application.



Turf Care – Dethatching

By Nick Vigna III, West Valley Area Manager

Dethatching is the process used to remove the excess thatch, the matted layer of dead plant material that builds up next to the soil at the base of the lawn. If not removed, the build up of thatch can prevent new grass from flourishing. Thatch build up is caused by a variety of factors, namely: over watering, over fertilizing, or growing on clay soils. The species of grass is also determinant of how often dethatching should be performed

It is best to dethatch during the active growing season. Doing this allows the turf time to recover, as dethatching is an injurious process. It is best to begin when the night-time air temperatures are above 60 degrees. However, it is important that heavy dethatching of Bermuda grass not be part of the fall over-seeding. If this is done too late in the summer or early fall season it is possible that dethatching may indirectly injure the turf. Thatch build up can be removed either by hand

raking, or power raking. Hand raking is very labor intensive and only practical for small areas. Power rakers are available for rent and use a series of steel blades or rigid wire tines to lift thatch from the soil. It is best if the soil is slightly moist during the process. Remove the clippings, thatch debris and continue. It is best if you always dethatch in at least two directions.



This is a cross section depicting built up thatch

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It is recommended that the Bermuda grass be allowed to “rest” from overseeding every 3 years. This will allow adequate time to better develop a healthy root system and to fill in bare or thin spots where Bermuda has not survived overseeding in the past.

Some of the additional benefits of non-overseeded Bermuda lawns:

- Savings on the cost of seed and fertilizer for new rye grass.
- Savings of irrigation water and associated costs because dormant Bermuda grass requires substantially less water.
- A stronger stand of Bermuda grass means fewer weed problems and less money spent

on weed control chemicals.

- Less time spent not only on overseeding but also mowing during the winter months.



Properly maintained Bermuda grass can be achieved by following proper practices and by giving it a rest every once in a while.



MONTHLY LANDSCAPE CHECKLIST

Plant Renovation List (Common Type Plants)

- √ Mediterranean Fan Palm
- √ Bat-Faced Cuphea

– General Irrigation Setting (Actual times will vary depending on the precipitation rate of your system)

- √ Bermuda Grass Turf irrigated using typical pop-up sprinklers: 10 – 12 minutes three times per week.
- √ Drip irrigation for Plants: 15 – 25 minutes two times per week. These times are for ornamental type plants. Native or xeriscape plants will require less.

Drip irrigation for Trees: 30 – 40 minutes one

- √ time per week. These times are for ornamental type trees. Native or xeriscape trees will require less.

Please remember that these are general recommendations and depending on your system you may need to adjust watering times up or down. Also, if we do receive rain then irrigation can be suspended until the soil dries.

Turf Fertilization for the Bermuda grass should be completed once every six to eight weeks on average using fertilizer containing at least 16–20% Nitrogen. Apply following the label and make sure to water in for a few minutes after application. Now is also a great time to dethatch your turf to help remove built up thatch (dead grass material). This can be accomplished using a hard rake for small areas or a power rake which can be rented locally. After raking is complete, use your mower to collect all of the thatch material. This will invigorate your turf and promote new healthy growth.