

Trying to Kill Bermuda Grass?

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

Bermuda grass is a warm season grass native to Africa and likely southern Asia. In the middle 1700s it was brought into Georgia as possible use as a forage grass and the rest is history. It is used routinely in the South as a livestock forage and even planted in parts of Kansas. It is often used as a lawn grass and an athletic field grass due to its aggressive growth habit and durability.

The good thing about Bermuda grass is that it does grow well in hot and dry conditions and its aggressive nature causes it to make a very dense turf in which weeds struggle to become established. It has numerous drawbacks however. It doesn't grow in even light shade; it needs full sun. It has above ground stolons and below ground rhizomes that allow it to spread readily and so it invades flower beds, gardens and anywhere that you don't really want it. From a turf grass perspective it also greens up late, goes dormant early and even when well fertilized, isn't as dark green as fescue or bluegrass.

Bermuda grass is growing its best when fescue and bluegrass wants to rest or go into summer dormancy. A little bit of Bermuda grass in a neighbors yard, or even a sprig of it that hitches a ride into your yard with a lawn care service can get established. Then it stealthily creeps its way across your yard and the next thing you know, it is everywhere! Bermuda grass is at its northern limit of winter survivability here in northern Kansas. If it's a dry fall and winter and we have below zero temperatures, Bermuda grass will winterkill. We saw this a couple of winter's ago and I saw a few lawns with Bermuda grass get seriously damaged. But waiting for the right bit of winter weather isn't a good way to deal with it!

About the only way to truly get rid of Bermuda grass is to kill the entire yard with glyphosate and then replant it. If you want to try this then late July is the time to get started. You want to make sure that the Bermuda grass is growing well. If it hasn't rained recently, give the lawn a good irrigation and then spray it with glyphosate and wait. If you are just doing a portion of the yard, go several feet further than you think the Bermuda grass is growing because it's just tricky like that. Then wait about two weeks. Mow the lawn short and water it again. You want to encourage any plant parts that didn't die to get growing well so you can treat it again with glyphosate. Then repeat this process once more. You rarely get all of the Bermuda grass killed with one treatment which is why you mow it low and water it again. After you've done this three times it will be early September so you can till up the lawn and get it reseeded with improved tall fescue or Kentucky bluegrass.

If you just have a few spots where Bermuda grass is getting started or you are trying to keep it from coming in from a neighbors yard there is a herbicide that you can use. BioAdvanced has a product called Bermuda Grass Control for Lawns. It is intended to be used on bluegrass, fescue, or ryegrass lawns to suppress and/or kill Bermuda grass. It is not to be used on other lawn grasses like Zoysia or Buffalograss. The active ingredient is fenoxypop-p-ethyl. For well established patches of Bermuda grass the instructions advise to treat once a month for seven months. In our latitudes I'm not sure if Bermuda grass is even green and growing for seven months out of the year. In the end, trying to get rid of or prevent Bermuda grass from getting into your yard is going to mean a lot of work. You may have to just ask yourself if it is worth the effort to try to stop it before you expend the money and time!