

WILLIAMSON COUNTY

PROFESSIONAL

BULLETIN

GROUNDS MAINTENANCE

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Turfgrasses for Williamson County

Many homeowners are either renovating their lawns or establishing new lawns. Everyone is looking for the “picture perfect” lawn grass. One that is inexpensive to purchase, requires very little mowing, very little water, and has no insect or disease problems. In addition, they want a grass that grows well in either full sun or total shade and stays a lush green twelve months out of the year.

Unfortunately, there is no perfect lawn grass; they all have advantages and disadvantages. The best grass, in many respects, is a matter of personal taste and preference.

Before deciding on a lawn grass, consider the following: tolerance to alkaline clay soils, drought and heat resistance, shade tolerance, ease of establishment, fertility requirement, disease and insect resistance, and water requirements. Remember, water requirements of a turfgrass are, many times, more a factor of the aesthetic look required by the homeowner than the actual requirements of the grass. Water requirements may be dictated by where the grass is planted. Grasses planted in shallow soils are going to need more irrigation than grasses planted in soils 6-8 inches deep.

Common Bermuda and St. Augustine are still the most widely used grasses for lawns in this area. Gaining in popularity are relatively new grasses known as Zoysia and Buffalograss. Homeowners wanting to plant a native turfgrass for a home lawn could use Buffalograss.

Drought Tolerant Grasses

An eleven variety Non-Irrigated Turfgrass Study was established at the Williamson County Extension Center in 1997. The purpose of this study was to evaluate eleven different turfgrass varieties for home lawn use in the Central Texas area when grown under non-irrigated conditions. The buffalo grasses performed best in the Turfgrass Drought Study for the year 2000 with Nebraska 609 being the highest rated turfgrass in the study. The St. Augustinegrasses performed the worst for the year 2000, with the exception of the St. Augustinegrass variety Floratam. The Floratam continues to be one of the highest rated turfgrasses overall in the drought study, right behind Nebraska 609. Our concern with Floratam is its winter hardiness in this area. Thus far our winters have not been cold enough to fully evaluate its winter hardiness. After three years of no supplemental irrigation on these plots, the St. Augustinegrass varieties Raleigh and Palmetto have pretty much disappeared. The zoysiagrasses and bermudagrasses performed intermediate between the buffalograsses and the St. Augustinegrasses. After three years of no supplemental irrigation, the following turfgrass varieties (Nebraska 609, Top Gun, JaMur and Floratam) have demonstrated the ability to survive without supplemental irrigation.

Types of Turfgrasses

St. Augustine:

Continues to be the most widely used turfgrasses in the Williamson County area. Its main claim to fame is that it will tolerate our alkaline soil, grows in the shade (60 percent), and covers quickly. It is also reasonably priced and widely available.

St. Augustine as a turf is susceptible to certain diseases, namely brown patch and St. Augustine decline (SAD); is more susceptible to iron chlorosis than Bermuda or Buffalo; is attacked by chinch bugs; needs more water for survival than Bermuda or Buffalo; and must be established primarily by planting sod or plugs.

Many people erroneously use the “term carpet” grass in reference to St. Augustine, but carpet grass and St. Augustine are actually different species of grasses. Carpet grass is a low-quality grass established from seed that thrives in low, wet areas of the southeastern U.S. It is not suitable for Central Texas.

Palmetto, DelMar and AmeriShade are new St. Augustine varieties homeowners may want to consider planting. They performed well in our variety trial. Raleigh, DelMar and Amerishade St. Augustine varieties are resistant to the St. Augustine Decline virus. AmeriShade will tolerate a higher percentage of shade than the other varieties.

Zoysiagrass:

Within the past two years there have been some fourteen new zoysia grasses released for our area. We have all fourteen at our Center. Zoysiagrasses offer a new look so to speak in the landscaping arena. They have the potential to replace St. Augustine. Zoysiagrasses will grow in fifty percent shade; have high wear (traffic) tolerance; will tolerate our alkaline soil; go dormant in the winter, but offer an attractive straw brown color; and have a high aesthetic value. From our observations we would encourage homeowners to consider the following varieties: Jamur, Palisade and Empire. We would recommend solid sodding with the zoysias, but they can be plugged. These varieties are not available to be planted by seeding.

Buffalograss:

The Buffalograsses have received lots of attention over the past several years. We have 609, Prairie and Density, and the seeded variety Top Gun at our Center. Buffalograss will grow in up to 30 percent shade; performs well in alkaline soils, can be mowed higher and less frequently than the other grasses. We have been especially impressed with 609 and Density Buffalo at our Center. One must remember that this is an open type grass and not as dense as Bermuda, Zoysia or St. Augustine. The Buffalograsses must be either sodded or plugged while varieties such as Top Gun and Bison are seeded. Buffalograss can be planted by seed, sod or plugs. However, if you select one of the female only varieties such as Nebraska 609 or Density, then it has to be sodded or plugged.

Bermudagrass:

Bermudagrass does not tolerate shade. It turns brown after the first frost in the fall and is more of a nuisance in flower beds and gardens because of the aggressive underground stems. Common bermudagrass can be established by seeding, sod, sprigs or plugging.

Many varieties of hybrid Bermudagrass are available. While these are more attractive than common, they

require a higher degree of maintenance (fertilizing, watering, mowing) and are not normally recommended for the average lawn owner. The hybrid bermudagrasses are established by sodding, sprigging or plugging only. One of the hybrids would be Quick Stand a common vegetative type Bermuda.

There are some new seeded types of bermudagrasses such as Princess-77, Riveria and Yukon. These grasses are more expensive than the older common type bermudagrasses, but have a much darker green color and finer texture. Princess-77 is actually a hybrid type bermudagrass that can be planted from seed.

Fescue:

This cool season turfgrass has good shade tolerance, especially when grown in areas where the trees lose their foliage in the winter. However, this grass will require considerably more water than the other turfgrasses grown in the Central Texas area and tend to thin out during the hot summer months. Tall fescue is not recommended for this area of the state.

Blue Grass:

We evaluated three Hybrid Bluegrasses: Reville, 100 and 300 series. Blue Grass will stay green throughout the winter months and struggles some in July-mid September. The 100 or 300 Series will grow in our area but would require an inch of water a week. These grasses should only be considered for specialty areas in the landscape.

Sea Shore Paspalum:

SeaIsle 1 was evaluated in our plot. The grass performed well under our management program of an inch of water per week (when needed) and mowing every seven days. Without proper (constant) management this grass can become a problem.

2002-2005 Turfgrass Variety Trial:

The following charts are from our Nineteen Variety Turfgrass Trial. The purpose of this trial was to evaluate nineteen different turfgrass varieties over a three year period for their use in home landscapes and commercial sites in Williamson County. Included in the trial were:

St. Augustinegrass	Zoysiagrass	Hybrid bluegrasses	Bermudagrass	Buffalograss
AmeriShade	Empire	Reveille	Celebration	Density
DelMar	Palisade	100 series	GN-1	Nebraska 609
Floritam	Royal	300 series	TifSport	
Palmetto	Variety X			
	Zeon			
	Zorro			

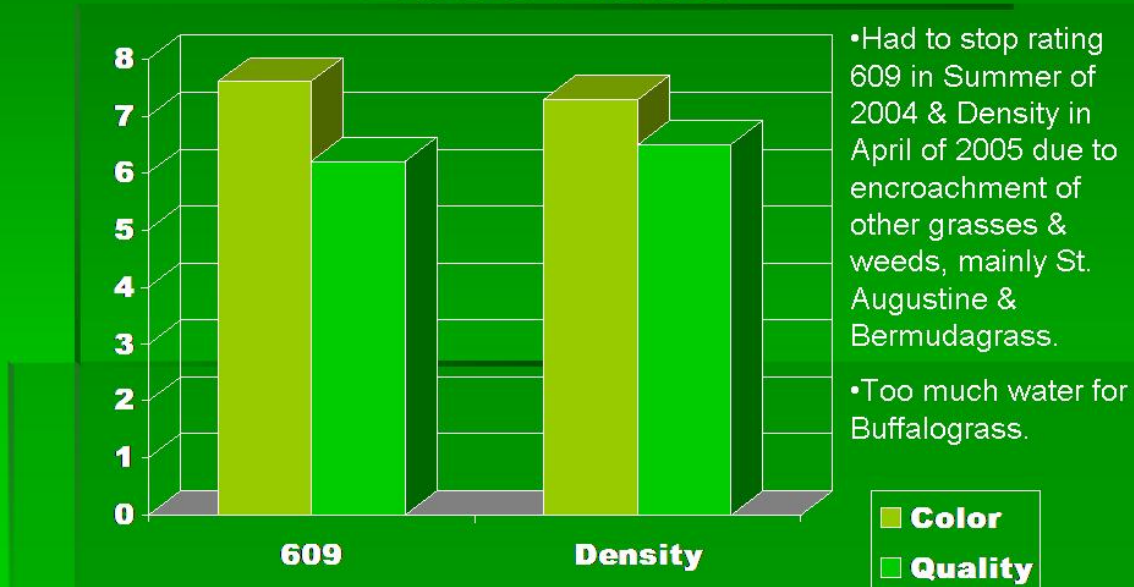
SeaShore paspalum

SeaIsle 1

Starting in 2003, plots were rated on a monthly basis for color, density and turfgrass quality. A 1 through 9 rating scale was used to rate the plots. For color, a rating of 1 equaled brown turfgrass, while 9 equaled dark green color. Note, each turfgrass variety was rated for acceptable color by species. For density, a 1 equaled 100% dirt (no grass), while 9 equaled 100% turfgrass coverage. For turfgrass quality, a 1 equaled the poorest overall quality,

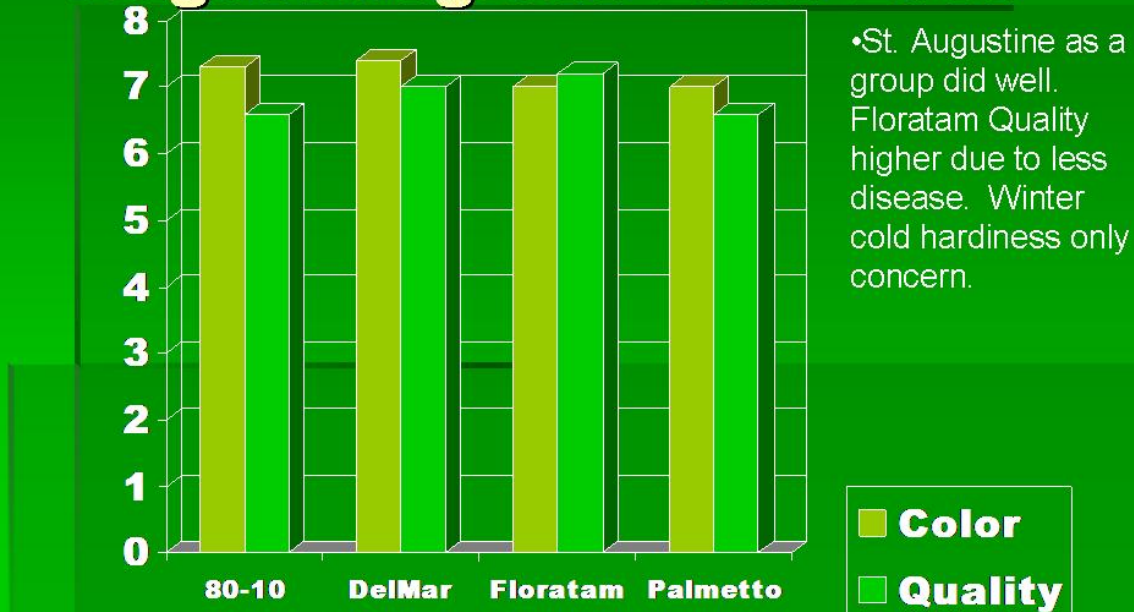
while 9 equaled the highest quality. Note, a rating below 6.0 is generally considered unacceptable.

Average Color & Quality Ratings for Buffalograss 2003-2005*



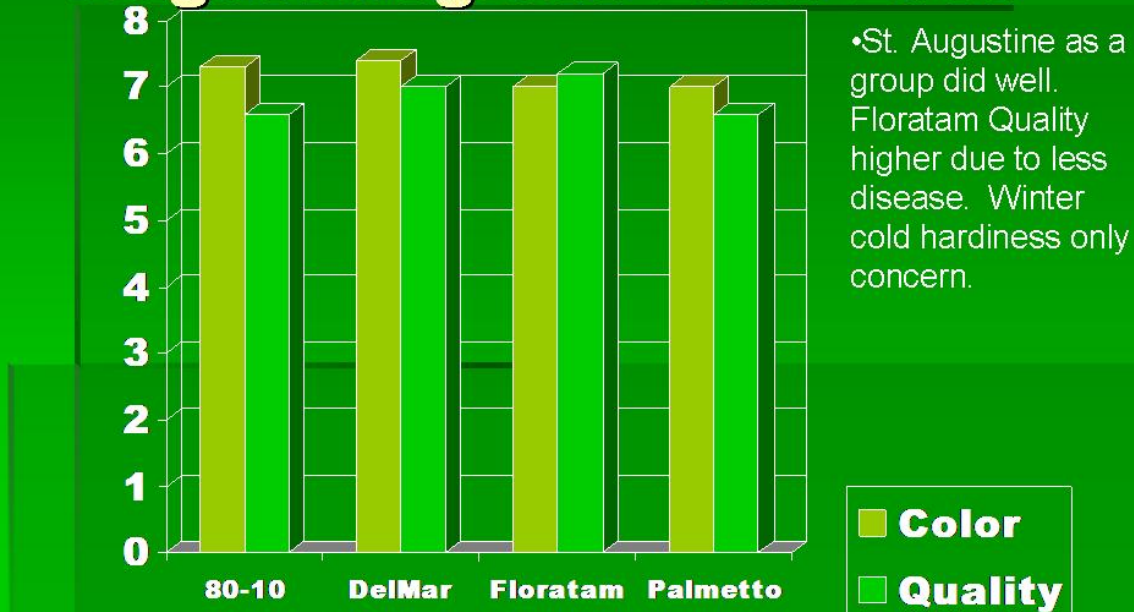
*Ratings during growing season from April-October

Average Color & Quality Ratings for St. Augustinegrass 2003-2005*



*Ratings during growing season from April-October

Average Color & Quality Ratings for St. Augustinegrass 2003-2005*



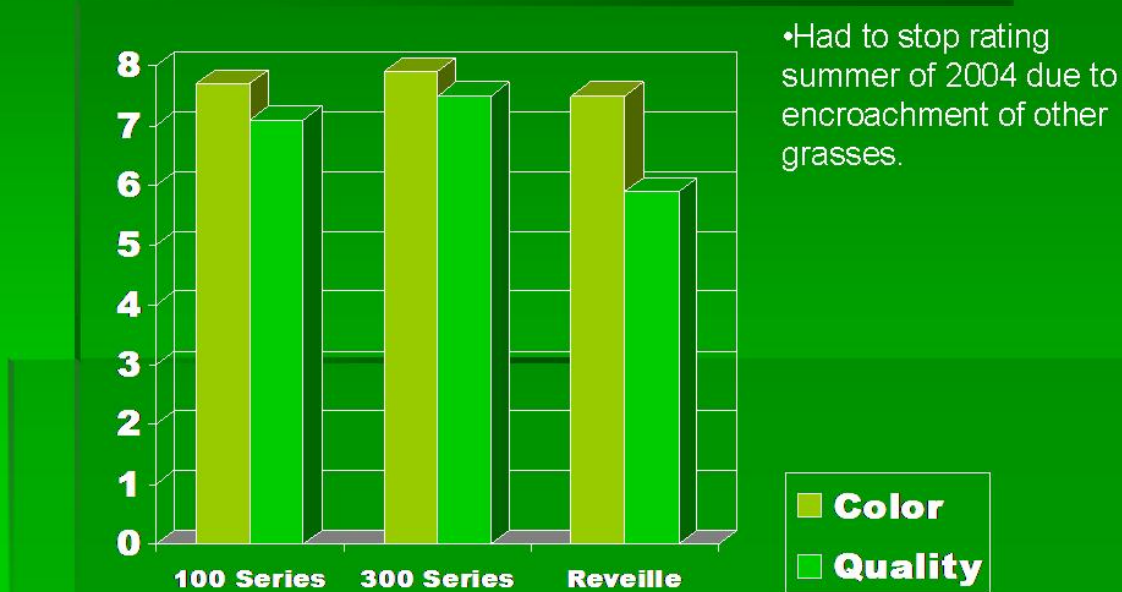
*Ratings during growing season from April-October

Average Color & Quality Ratings for SeaShore Paspalum 2003-2005*



*Ratings during growing season from April-October

Average Color & Quality Ratings for Bluegrasses 2003-2005*



*Ratings during growing season from January to December

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