



Homeowners Guide to Bermudagrass Management in Florida

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Bermudagrasses (*Cynodon* spp.) are warm-season grasses adapted to most soils and climates in Florida. They have excellent wear, drought, and salt tolerance. When properly managed, they produce a vigorous, medium-to-dark green, dense turf. However, bermudagrasses generally require higher levels of maintenance than other Florida lawn grasses, and they have poor cold and shade tolerance. For more information on bermudagrass species and cultivars, refer to ENH19, *Bermudagrass for Florida Lawns* (<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/LH007>).



Establishment

- Bermudagrasses are established vegetatively (sod, plugs, or sprigs) and by seed.
 - » In general, vegetatively propagated cultivars will require increased levels of maintenance (greater nutrition, mowing frequency, etc.).
 - » Seeded cultivars generally have lower overall quality and performance than vegetatively propagated cultivars.
- It can be established any time of year in much of Florida.
 - » North Florida, the best time is during the spring and early summer months.
- Keep soil moist until the grass is well rooted, then watering should be reduced to an as-needed basis.
 - » 7-10 days after planting - multiple, short (5-10 minutes) irrigation events throughout the course of the day. For the next 7-10 days, irrigate once a day to apply ¼-½ inch of water. After this, frequency should be reduced to 2-3 times weekly, again applying ¼-½ inch of water. Once fully established (generally, three to four weeks after sodding), irrigation can begin on an as-needed basis.

- Newly planted lawn should not be fertilized until 30-60 days after planting.
- First mowing should occur once the grass is well rooted, generally 14-21 days after planting.
- For more information, refer to ENH02, *Preparing to Plant a Florida Lawn* (<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/lh012>), and ENH3, *Establishing Your Florida Lawn* (<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/lh013>).

Nutrition

Fertilizer applications should be made following the Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Best Management Practices (BMP), Florida Urban Turf Fertilization Rule (5E-1.003 F.A.C.), and state and local regulations.

- Annual nitrogen fertilization recommendations for different geographic regions in Florida can found in Table 1.
 - » These rates are likely higher than needed for residential landscapes.
 - » Annual fertilization recommendations should be split into multiple applications and applied when the turfgrass is actively growing.
- Phosphorus levels are best determined by soil testing, and test results often indicate phosphorus applications are not warranted.
- In general, the first fertilizer application should be early to mid-April in central and north Florida, respectively.
 - » Nitrogen applications made prior to the last frost may result in damaged turfgrass.
- South Florida, applications may be made throughout the year due to year-round growth.

- Homeowners are encouraged to initiate a program based on the guidelines in Table 1, and then adjust this over time based on the turfgrass response.
- For more information refer to ENH1089, *Urban Turf Fertilizer Rule for Home Lawn Fertilization* (<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep353>), and ENH979, *Homeowner Best Management Practices for the Home Lawn* (<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep236>).

Mowing

- No more than 1/3 of the leaf blades should be removed with any mowing.
- Grass clippings should be left on the lawn, unless has excessive clumps or if appearance is important.
- Low to moderate levels of management – 1-2 inch mowing height.
- Higher levels of management – 0.5 inch mowing height can be achieved but requires frequent mowing.
- For more information, refer to ENH10, *Mowing Your Florida Lawn* (<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/lh028>).

Watering

- An established, mature grass should be irrigated on an as-needed basis.
- When moisture stress occurs (leaf blades begin to wilt or turn a blue-gray color), apply 1/2-3/4 inch of water per application.
- Bermudagrass can persist through droughts, but it will turn brown as it enters dormancy (stops growing).
 - » Once rainfall or irrigation resumes, it will revive and resume growth.
- Follow any local watering restrictions and adjust irrigation accordingly.
- For more information, refer to ENH9, *Watering Your Florida Lawn* (<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/lh025>).

Pest Management

- If weeds are a persistent problem, use herbicides labeled for bermudagrass.
 - » For more information, refer to ENH884, *Weed Management in Home Lawns* (<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep141>).
- A major insect pest are mole crickets. Other insect pests include sod webworms, armyworms, cutworms, grass loopers, and bermudagrass mites.

» For more information, refer to ENY300, *Insect Pest Management on Turfgrass* (<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ig001>).

- Major disease problems are dollar spot, large patch, and Helminthosporium.
 - » For more information, refer to SS-PLP-14, *Turfgrass Disease Management* (<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/lh040>), PP-233, *Homeowner's Guide to Fungicides for Lawn and Landscape Disease Management* (<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pp154>), and https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/topic_turf_diseases.
- Nematodes are the most serious pest of bermudagrass in Florida, which cause yellowing and general thinning of turf, especially during hot, dry periods.
 - » Extensive damage can occur on turf grown on sandy soils and/or under high-maintenance regimes.
 - » For more information, refer to ENY006, *Nematode Management in Residential Lawns* (<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ng039>).

Local UF/IFAS Extension offices can assist with pest identification and management recommendations. Additionally, a healthy, vigorous lawn is the best approach to pest control.

Reference and More Information on Bermudagrass Lawns

ENH19, *Bermudagrass for Florida Lawns* (<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/LH007>)

Table 1. Annual nitrogen fertilization recommendations for bermudagrass in three regions of Florida.

Location ¹	Nitrogen Fertility Recommendations ^{2,3} (lbs N/1000 sq ft/year)
North Florida	3-5
Central Florida	4-6
South Florida	5-7

¹North Florida is considered north of Ocala, Central Florida is from Ocala to State Road 60, and South Florida is south of State Road 60.

²These rates are likely higher than needed for residential landscapes. Research is needed to better refine them.

³Homeowner preferences for lawn quality and maintenance level vary; therefore, a range of fertility rates are recommended. Additionally, effects within a localized region and microenvironmental influences (i.e., shade, drought, soil conditions, and irrigation) necessitate ranges of fertility rates. Recommendations also assume that grass clippings are recycled.