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FS# 7108HORT

## Lawns: Considerations for New or Renewed Lawns

Most often, when a home is built, shrubs and other perennials are planted around the home with a few trees and palms planted about. Typically, the remainder of the yard is then covered in sod. For smaller yards, this isn't necessarily a problem. For large yards, ranging anywhere from 5,000 to 20,000 plus square feet, problems are not uncommon. After all, large lawns, as well as large neighborhoods made up of small yards, are essentially a monoculture. A variety of pest problems can occur, including insects, diseases, and weeds. There are a number of items to consider when choosing the type of grass to grow along with possible suggestions to consider for reducing the amount of lawn to care for.

When planning for a new lawn, here are some things to consider:

- Think of turf as “functional” as in: Why do you want a lawn?
  - For aesthetics because it is pretty? Maybe a smaller area of turf will do the trick instead.
  - For children to play on?
  - For pets to play on?
  - To wiggle your toes in?
- Recognize the “cost” of a “perfect” lawn. If you insist on having a “perfect” lawn, with no weeds and a deep green color, then say goodbye to all of your other hobbies and cancel your health club membership!
- Decide: Do I want this much grass? The more grass, the more likelihood of insect and diseases! Think of your lawn as a monoculture, like a corn field. The more grass, and your neighborhood as a whole is part of this equation, the increased chances for pest problems.
- Consider adding a tree island to reduce turf, if you have the space. Plant a variety of five or more trees together in a group, planting the trees 10 feet apart. Mulch underneath the entire tree island. For a group of pine trees, use pine needles as the mulch. Observations have shown that the trees can provide extra protection for buildings during storms. A group is defined as five or more trees, each growing within 10 feet of each other, but not in a row. Trees provide many environmental benefits, such as providing shade and energy conservation, reducing the well-known “heat island” effect in cities caused by concrete and pavement, and increasing property values. For more information refer to Chapter 5: Wind and Trees: Lessons Learned from Hurricanes <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf/FR/FR17300.pdf>
- Plant a turf alternative to increase biodiversity. For sunny locations, there is our native sunshine mimosa, *Mimosa strigillosa*, which is excellent for erosion control, our native frog fruit, *Phyla nodiflora*, the native twinflower, *Dyschoriste* sp., and the non-native perennial peanut, *Arachis glabrata*, etc. For shady locations, there is mondo grass, *Ophiopogon japonicus*, or our native Browne's savory, *Clinopodium brownei*, which can also tolerate moist locations, just to name a few.

- Observe: Is there enough light throughout the yard for grass? Determine if turf is the best plant for the different locations throughout your yard. Does the location receive full sun (which receives a minimum of six hours of direct sunlight a day) or partial shade? There are some cultivars of St. Augustinegrass (i.e. Seville, Bitterblue, Jade, etc.) that are shade tolerant.
- Too much shade? Don't grow grass if the location receives no direct sunlight, or very small amounts. Instead, grow shade tolerant ground covers or just have mulch or pine needles to cover the soil.
- Is there irrigation? An irrigation system will make growing grass much easier when ample rain doesn't fall often enough.
- Is the location level? The more the ground slopes, the harder it can be to water.
- Is the site poorly drained or does it stay wet for long periods? If the answer is yes, then don't try to grow grass there!
- Know the soil pH for turf selection. Bahiagrass is acid loving and prefers a pH of 5.0-5.5, whereas St. Augustine and Bermuda can tolerate a wide range of pH from 5.0-8.0.
- Choose the right grass for your lawn. Refer to this website [http://hort.ifas.ufl.edu/yourfloridalawn/turfgrass\\_selection.shtml](http://hort.ifas.ufl.edu/yourfloridalawn/turfgrass_selection.shtml) and read the bulletins for the types of turf that you are considering. Every type of grass will require care, so read about the pros and cons of each grass when making your decision.

Thoughtful planning, when landscaping a new home or replacing an old lawn, can lead to reduced time and effort for maintenance. In addition, the curb appeal of the home can be improved, which can increase property values.