

## **Beware of Wonder Grasses**

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"If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is." This phrase offers sound advice for the person looking for the "perfect" lawngrass. It's not uncommon to see advertisements for the perfect lawngrass. You should be skeptical when reading advertisements that proclaim an "amazing" grass that produces a "lush, green lawn" with very little care. Question advertisements for grass seed mixtures that will grow from "Alaska to Florida." Beware of advertisements that do not include a specific name for the lawngrass being sold. Don't believe advertisements that claim their grass "even grows in impossible spots."

A number of years ago, I called a company that was advertising a grass seed mixture in our area in hopes of finding out specifically what grass seeds were in this "too good to be true" mixture. I was told the seed mixture included Kentucky bluegrass, creeping red fescuegrass and annual ryegrass. This information was not included anywhere in the advertisement. It is possible to order pounds of this seed mixture without ever knowing what is being ordered. And it is advertised as a grass mixture that will produce an attractive lawn for Florida.

Because our permanent lawngrasses in North Florida go dormant (turn brown) during the winter months, some people prefer to overseed their lawn with ryegrass during the fall. The ryegrass seeds germinate and produce a green lawn during the winter and early spring; however, as the weather warms in late spring and summer the ryegrass dies. The same would be true for fescuegrass and bluegrass. Ryegrass, fescuegrass and bluegrass are cool season grasses that will not tolerate our hot, humid summer weather. They will not produce a permanent lawn in our area.

Another frequently advertised grass is zoysia. Even though zoysiagrass will grow in our area, some overenthusiastic advertisements have misinformed the public on the merits of this grass. Zoysiagrass can produce a beautiful lawn; however, despite the advertisements, it is not the perfect grass either. Before planting zoysiagrass, I suggest you talk to someone who has maintained a zoysiagrass lawn in our area.

Basically there are seven types of grasses from which to choose when considering planting a lawn in Florida. Centipede and St. Augustine are the most commonly planted in our area. Bahia, bermuda, carpet, seashore paspalum and zoysia are used less often. None of these produce a perfect lawn. All of these grasses have advantages and disadvantages, which should be looked at and understood before choosing a grass for your lawn.

Given enough time, most people in our area will become frustrated with their lawn. As a result north Florida is a great area to market a too good to be true "wonder" grass. It's difficult to grow a lawn here. All of our lawngrasses are native to other parts of the world – they did not exist in our native ecosystem. People's expectations for a Florida lawn are too high. Because of these factors, many people are looking for that too good to be true grass. But be cautious before spending your time and money on one of those "perfect" lawngrasses.

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