

How to Select and Install Sod

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WHY SOD?

What other plant material, besides sod, is so quick to cover, immediately controls soil erosion, keeps soil from turning into dust or mud, controls/reduces weeds, can be used once rooted, can be planted nearly year round, and is suitable for new installation or repair?

TURFGRASS SPECIES AND VARIETIES

Texas sod producers carefully select the grass varieties they grow and provide a quality product of the most improved grasses. Quality sod consists of excellent turf varieties with no serious pest problems. The Turfgrass Producers of Texas website (<http://www.txsod.com/>) lists member producers and their grasses.

Bermudagrass

Bermudagrass is grown throughout Texas. It has very good drought and traffic tolerance but has little shade tolerance. Varieties are available for use as lawns, golf courses, and athletic fields. The hybrid or vegetative (planted only as sod or sprigs – not available as seed) bermudagrasses are usually darker green in color, finer textured, and more aggressive than the common-type bermudagrass varieties. The hybrid bermudagrasses are better adapted for use on golf course fairways and sports fields than for home lawns. Generally, the maintenance requirement (mowing frequency, nitrogen fertility, etc.) for the hybrid bermudagrasses is higher than for the common-type bermudagrasses. Examples of bermudagrass varieties available from Texas sod producers include, but are not limited to, Baby; Celebration; CT-2; Common; GN-1; Grimes EXP; Quickstand; Tifgreen; Tifway; TifSport; and Tifton 10.

Buffalograss

Buffalograss is best adapted for areas with low annual rainfall (25 inches or less). Buffalograsses have a very low irrigation requirement. When planted in the higher rainfall areas of eastern Texas, or when excess irrigation water is applied, other grass species and weeds easily invade buffalograss. It does best in open sun but has only slight tolerance of shade. It functions well as a low maintenance lawns turf from Central to West Texas. The more popular sodded varieties, that do not produce viable seed, are only established vegetatively. They include: Density, Prairie, Prestige, and 609.

Centipedegrass

Centipedegrass adapted to the acid soils of East Texas as a low maintenance turf. It is slow-growing and coarse-leafed.

Growing well in full sun to light shade, it does not tolerate traffic or prolonged drought. It nevertheless requires little fertilizer and infrequent mowing. It is best established vegetatively by sodding. There are few Centipedegrass varieties in the marketplace. Available varieties include Common, and TifBlair.

Seashore Paspalum

Seashore paspalum has received attention due its tolerance to saline soil condition and irrigation water of high salt content. The marketplace has not yet embraced seashore paspalum in Texas. As such sod has not been readily available. Vegetative varieties include: Adalayd/Excalibre, Aloha, Salam, SeaDwarf, Sea Isle I, Sea Isle 2000, and Sea Spray.

St. Augustinegrass

St. Augustinegrass is a coarse species. It functions mainly as a lawn grass and includes the most shade tolerant among the warm-season turfgrasses. It can be grown in most of Texas. Lack of cold hardiness limits its use in the northern 1/3 of Texas since it may winter-kill in those areas from time to time. Adaptation from Central to West Texas is limited due to reduced drought tolerance compared to bermudagrass and zoysiagrass. It can be grown in Central and West Texas with greater amounts of supplemental irrigation. It performs very well in Southeast Texas. St. Augustinegrass is a low to moderate maintenance lawn grass that does not tolerate high amounts of traffic. It is best established by sod. St. Augustinegrass varieties available include: Amerishade, Captiva, Delmar, Floratam, Palmetto, Raleigh, Sapphire, and Seville.

Zoysiagrass

Zoysiagrass has an area of adaption that is similar to that of bermudagrass in Texas. Improved varieties typically require less nitrogen fertilizer than bermudagrass. Zoysiagrasses are drought tolerant, yet they tend to discolor and turn brown earlier than bermudagrass during an extended drought. Varieties have moderate to good shade tolerance. Zoysiagrasses are not as shade tolerant as St. Augustinegrass. Zoysiagrass does well on lawns and only moderately trafficked recreational areas where excessive traffic is not anticipated. It is best established from sod. Zoysiagrasses varieties have improved in recent years over the older Meyer variety. Two species of zoysiagrass are in sod production in Texas. *Zoysia japonica* types are medium textured and do well with "normal" lawn maintenance practices. The *Zoysia matrella* types have a much finer leaf texture that produces a very dense turf. *Z. matrella* types

maintenance (closer and more frequent mowing) than *Zoysia japonica* varieties. *Zoysia japonica* varieties include: Carrizo, Crowne, El Toro, Empire, GN-Z, Jamur, Meyer, and Palisades. The *Zoysia matrella* varieties include Cavalier, Diamond, Royal, Y-2, Zeon, and Zorro. Emerald is an older variety that is similar to *Z. matrella* types in appearance and growth.

BEFORE CONTACTING GROWERS

- ☑ If time permits, submit a soil test to your County Extension Office at least one month prior to preparing the soil so pH adjustment and fertilizer recommendations can be followed prior to sod installation.
- ☑ Measure area to be sodded in square yards or square feet. One square yard = 9 square feet. There are 111 sq. yds. per 1000 sq. ft. An acre is 43,560 sq. ft. or 4840 sq. yds.
- ☑ Determine whether you have the proper vehicle for transporting the amount of sod you need and how many trips will be required. The following are suggested ranges of vehicle carrying capacity in square yards: a medium sized car - 5 to 10, a one-half ton pickup 25 to 50, a one-ton truck - 100, a two-ton truck - 300 to 500, a tandem (10-wheel) - 500-600, and a tractor trailer (18-wheel) 1,000 to 1,000. If the soil is wet, less sod can be carried. Dry sod weighs about 20 to 25 lbs. per square yard whereas wet sod can weigh 30 to 40 lbs. per square yard. A pallet of sod will contain 50 to 75 square yards (450 to 675 sq. ft.) of sod. If you are buying sod by the roll and are concerned about keeping your vehicle clean, bring something on which to lay the sod.

WHEN CONTACTING THE GROWER OR LANDSCAPER

- ☑ Know how many square yards or square feet of the particular type of sod you want to purchase.
- ☑ Determine the services provided and the cost of services (e.g., pallet charges).
- ☑ Sod farm and landscape companies who distribute sod vary in services. They may include any of the following: pick up sod on pallets at farm, delivery to site, site grading, fertilization, installation, and post-installation service programs.
- ☑ Once you select a grower or landscaper, call as far ahead of installation time as possible to insure the sod will be available when you need it.

SITE PREPARATION

Completely prepare the site for installation prior to pick-up or delivery. Cultivate the soil using a rototiller. Rototill

the soil to a minimum depth of 4-inches. Allow time for the soil to settle with repeated irrigation and then establish the final grade. Incorporate fertilizer and lime according to soil test recommendations. Rake the area until smooth and remove debris/stones. Sod is perishable and is best installed within 24 to 36 hours of harvest!

WHEN INSTALLING SOD

- ☑ Lightly rake the area to be sodded just prior to installation. Sod survival is greatest when installed on a well prepared soil that is relatively moist and cool.
- ☑ Lay the first line of sod along a straight line such as a driveway, sidewalk, or a string stretched between two stakes. Then stagger the sod pieces in the adjacent rows in "brickwork" fashion. Since sod pieces may shrink after installation, push the sod pieces together tightly.
- ☑ Try to minimize soil compaction in the installation area by using wheelbarrows to move the sod. Plywood boards laid in heavy tracking areas will minimize compaction.
- ☑ Roll sod with a heavy hand roller after you lay it to press roots to intimate contact with the soil.
- ☑ Thoroughly water the sod immediately after installation, wetting the soil to a 4-inch depth. Examine the soil under several pieces of sod to insure wetting.

MAINTAINING NEW SOD

- ☑ Begin mowing the sod with a sharp mower as soon as it is rooted. Mow frequently enough so that you do not remove more than 1/3 of the existing green tissue.
- ☑ Mow within the the normal mowing height range for the turfgrass planted.
- ☑ To encourage sod rooting water every 2 to 3 days or just often enough to make sure the soil is moist, not wet, to a 3 to 4-inch depth. Warm season grasses sodded in late fall through winter may not be well rooted till spring. Therefore irrigation may be needed to prevent the sod from drying out until spring rooting begins. In hotter weather (above 80°F) new sod may need watering on a daily basis, irrigating the site uniformly until the sod is well rooted.
- ☑ After the sod is well rooted, irrigate deeply and infrequently to aid deep rooting to enhance drought tolerance.

RELATED PUBLICATIONS

Search <http://soilcrop.tamu.edu/publications.html> for: Publication SCS-2009-05 (Turfgrass Selection for Texas) or Publication SCS-2009-06 (Turfgrass Establishment in Texas).

Produced by the Department of Soil and Crop Sciences, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas. For further information go to www.soilcrop.tamu.edu or <http://aggieturf.tamu.edu>. Search for other lawn and turf publications at <http://agrilifebookstore.org/>.

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