

Friday's Feature**By****Theresa Friday**

June 4, 2007

The New Kid on the Block –the New Zoysias

Maybe you've seen them. Lawns that are shorter, finer textured, dark green and don't succumb to chinch bugs. They're starting to appear, sometimes in whole neighborhoods, sometimes in individual lawns.

Dr. Laurie Trenholm, University of Florida Associate Professor and Urban Turfgrass Specialist, provides us updated information on the new zoysiagrasses.

Zoysiagrasses originated in the Orient. There are three different species of zoysia, although only one, *Zoysia japonica*, is used for home lawns. This is the most broad-leaved of the zoysias, although when compared to St. Augustine, the leaves are much smaller and finer. Although there is a good bit of variation the general characteristics of zoysia include good tolerance to shade, salinity, and wear.

Some zoysias are adapted to northern areas of the United States, where they may provide a green lawn from late spring to fall. They have not been used much in Florida until now due to two main concerns: slow growth and nematodes.

Some of the older japonica cultivars are very slow to establish, especially if plugged. These older cultivars have also traditionally suffered in nematode infested soils, making their use for lawns and landscapes in Florida very limited. However, some of the newer cultivars don't appear to suffer adverse consequences from either of these pitfalls.

Empire, one of the newer cultivars, was introduced commercially around 2000. It performs well in the landscape, although it is not trouble free. Empire does not tolerate excessive shade and will perform best where it receives six to eight hours of sunlight per day. This makes it about as shade tolerant as 'Floritam' St. Augustine.

Empire performs well in most lawns with less fertilizer than would be required by St. Augustine, maintaining a deep green color and dense canopy. Empire may green up later in the season than St. Augustine, so patience may be needed in the spring. Do not

overfertilize during this time in an effort to produce an instantaneous green lawn.

Empire should be mowed at about 1.5 – 2 inches in height. The frequency will be similar to St. Augustine. It may need to be watered with slightly less frequency than St. Augustine. Of course, this frequency will vary depending on time of year, soil conditions, shade, etc. There are currently no research data available to show that Empire requires significantly less water than St. Augustine.

Like many zoysias, Empire tends to develop excess thatch. It is also prone to attack by hunting billbugs and is susceptible to large patch disease.

UltimateFlora is a University of Florida release. It is in production around the state and is starting to appear as a home lawn option. It has slightly finer leaf blades than Empire and forms a dense canopy similar to the other zoysias. It establishes quickly laterally and will cover and fill in much more quickly than the older zoysia cultivars.

One question of considerable interest is water use of zoysia compared to St. Augustine. The comparison between water requirements of the two grasses is not documented with research data in Florida at this time, but it is probably fair to say that zoysia will survive with “less” water than most St. Augustine lawns.

Until research data in Florida indicates otherwise, follow the same advice for irrigating all turfgrass. This is to irrigate on an as-needed basis, not on a specific time schedule. Apply ½ to ¾ inch of water every time you irrigate- this should not vary; only the frequency will vary.

Dr. Trenholm can't say if zoysia will replace St. Augustine in Florida, but it is becoming more popular. If you have questions about managing a zoysia lawn go to <http://yourfloridalawn.ifas.ufl.edu> for help.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.

For additional information about all of the county extension services and other articles of interest go to: <http://www.santarosa.fl.gov/extension>.