



THE TRUTH ABOUT ST. AUGUSTINE GRASS:

**6 Simple Steps To a
Greener, Lusher Lawn**

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Introduction

You are probably reading this article because you have had difficulty growing St. Augustinegrass, you have purchased property with St. Augustinegrass and want to learn how to take care of it, or are thinking of installing a new lawn and are trying to decide what type of grass to use. In any case, I hope that this information will give you a better understanding of why we grow this grass and what it takes to grow a quality St. Augustinegrass lawn. Please feel free to contact us if you have any unanswered questions.

St. Augustinegrass, *Stenotaphrum secundatum*, is classified as a warm-season turfgrass. Although there are a few other warm-season turfgrass types that we can grow in Central Florida, St. Augustinegrass has remained the most popular for home lawn use in Central Florida for over 30 years.

Why do we spend so much money, effort, and time growing turfgrass? Turfgrass is important to us for its functionality, recreational use, and for its ornamental appearance. It is hard to imagine what our environment would look like without turfgrass. Turf controls wind and soil erosion, and eliminates dust. Turf reduces noise, surface heat, air pollution, glare, and mud around homes and other structures (including businesses and schools). Without turf, we would have an undesirable environment around our buildings that would harbor undesirable animals such as rodents, snakes and biting insects.

Although St. Augustinegrass can be found growing throughout Florida today, it wasn't first planted in Florida until the late 1800's and is thought to be native to West Africa, the Caribbean, and the West Indies. In the United States, St. Augustinegrass is primarily grown in Florida and Texas but can be found in any of the southern states.

In Florida, St. Augustinegrass has been planted primarily around homes and commercial buildings, and anywhere there is a desire to grow a turfgrass that will provide a high quality ornamental appearance. This appearance does not come without ongoing maintenance costs and these costs should be understood before agreeing to pay for maintaining a St. Augustinegrass lawn.

Over the years, several varieties of St. Augustinegrass have been developed by breeders to improve the characteristics of the grass for use as a turfgrass. Most of the varieties that have been developed and sold are no longer available because they were later discovered to have weaknesses or characteristics that made them undesirable for turfgrass use. Judging from the past, if you buy the latest and greatest variety today, there is a good chance it will no longer be available to purchase 5 to 10 years from now.

St. Augustinegrass is not very cold tolerant, is susceptible to severe damage from chinch bugs, can be overtaken by competitive and uncontrollable weeds, is not very wear tolerant, and requires irrigation to survive and look its best. Attempts to breed improved cold tolerance, chinch bug resistance, and drought tolerance in the grass have only had limited success. Breeders have been successful

however at developing semi-dwarf varieties that require closer mowing and provide a more manicured look.

St. Augustinegrass is not available from seed and is purchased as plugs or sod. It can be very difficult to know if 100% of the grass you are receiving is what you are told you are buying. Many of the varieties are extremely difficult to tell apart with the human eye. Human error, mutation and field contamination can occur. It can be important to know what grass you are receiving because some varieties are better in the shade than others and if you have shade, you want to be sure your variety will tolerate it.

Also, it is not uncommon to have sod that contains weeds, weed seeds, and fungal spores that can grow and be difficult or uncontrollable at a later date. If difficult to control weeds are present and easy to spot, the pieces of sod containing these weeds can easily be replaced before they are laid and rooted. Although growers make attempts to control weeds and fungus in their fields, these treatments are expensive and some growers produce better quality sod than others.

Each warm-season turfgrass has its pros and cons. Which turf is right for you will depend on several factors including how much shade you have or will have on your site, how much you are willing to spend on irrigation and maintenance (mowing and chemical care), any homeowners association requirements, utility, and finally the appearance you prefer.

There are full maintenance companies that will completely take care of your St. Augustinegrass lawn. Some folks will want to educate themselves and have the time and energy to take care of all the requirements themselves. Still others find a combination of some maintenance they are willing to do combined with a service to take care of the rest works better for them. Each option has its advantages and cost differences. Regardless of how you decide to do it, all of the necessary requirements must be met in order to be successful at growing this grass.

Turfgrass Establishment:

Successful turfgrass establishment is important because without it lawns perform poorly and become infested with weeds that later can be difficult or impossible to selectively control.

Proper soil preparation followed by the selection of quality sod that is of the appropriate variety for your general shade conditions, combined with properly installed irrigation all contribute to the success of turfgrass establishment. Neglecting any of these important steps can lead to necessary corrective action in order to maintain a healthy desired lawn. This action can include removing sod from an area that is too shady for grass to grow and replacing it with a more shade tolerant plant material, pruning a tree to allow more sunlight, adding or moving sprinklers, or removing the existing weed infested areas and re-sodding with the appropriate variety following proper soil preparation. **It is very important to start off with good quality sod and a properly working irrigation system to reduce future weed problems.**

Mowing:

St. Augustine grass should be mowed frequently enough to never remove more than one third of the grass blade and always with a sharp mower blade. Mowers should be set on the highest setting for all varieties other than semi-dwarf varieties such as *Seville* and *Delmar*, which should be mowed at about two and one half inches high. When mowing once per week, this practice can be easily followed during the slower growing cooler months but becomes more difficult during the fast growing rainy summer months.

A dull mower blade will split and tear the grass blades that will eventually die from their wounds. Split and torn grass blades can thin the grass, encourage weed growth, cause an entry point for fungus and detract from the overall appearance of the lawns color by combining dead grass blades with green healthy ones. Grass clippings should be mulched and returned to the grass to be used as an additional source of nutrients.

Irrigation:

There are several important things to know about irrigation systems. First of all, irrigation systems do not provide even coverage. Water coverage from an irrigation system does not compare to water coverage from rainfall. Second, irrigation systems don't know when your grass needs water and can't let you know when this occurs. Finally, irrigation systems require maintenance and even the best systems need attention from time to time. Proper irrigation conserves both water and fertilizer and contributes to a healthy lawn by encouraging healthy root growth while discouraging weeds that thrive during constant wet conditions.

Irrigation should be performed as needed by recognizing temporary wilt symptoms and then applying three-quarters of an inch of water. If a regular frequency is desired and you are in the St. Johns Water Management District, you must follow the irrigation requirements that allow watering one to two times per week (depending on the time of year) and only on specified days that correspond with your street address. Ask your Dr. Jack's horticulturist for a free irrigation gauge to help you determine how long you need to water each irrigation zone and set your timer accordingly.

Chinch bugs are the number one pest of St. Augustinegrass and are attracted to drought damaged turf. Chinch bugs are more difficult and expensive to control today due to pesticide resistance. Chinch bugs routinely attack drought damaged areas first so it is very important to properly irrigate your grass to avoid drought and chinch bug damage. Permanent drought and chinch bug damaged areas will become infested with weeds that may be difficult or selectively uncontrollable. Resodding will be necessary when severe drought or chinch bug damage occurs so it is important to keep a close eye on your grass for signs of wilt (grass blades fold in half lengthwise).

Although most St. Augustinegrass lawns that are growing in full sun may need irrigation during drought conditions to avoid damage, contrary to what most people think, St. Augustinegrass grows fine with rainfall only most of the time.

Fertilizing:

Fertilizer is a lot like vitamins. There are many different opinions on what fertilizer is the best and what the frequency and rate should be. Turfgrass experts will all agree that St. Augustinegrass must receive additional fertilizer other than grass clippings in order to be healthy and have a good green appearance. Most turfgrass experts will also tell you that St. Augustinegrass in Central Florida requires 4 to 6 pounds of nitrogen per 1000 square feet per year.

Most experts will also agree that nitrogen should be applied at rates up to 1 pound per 1000 square feet, and that formulations should contain some slow-release fertilizer when applying more than 1/2 of a pound of nitrogen per 1000 square feet. We recommend that as much as 50% of the nitrogen applied should be a slow-release form when applying 1 pound of nitrogen per 1000 square feet.

Do not be fooled by the term organic!

Organic can be an expensive slow release synthetic or natural long feeding product, or it can be a cheap quick release synthetic or natural slow feeding product. The important key word again is *slow-release*.

Since our soils in Central Florida usually contain adequate amounts of Phosphorus, and because Phosphorus is detrimental to the health of our lakes, it should be applied in smaller amounts than Nitrogen and Potassium or eliminated from the fertilizer completely. Potassium is important for root growth and should be included at rates close to those of Nitrogen.

Micronutrients such as Iron and Manganese help with turf color but can cause staining if applied to paved surfaces. **Generally, you get what you pay for when it comes to fertilizer.**

The cheaper the fertilizer the more you will need to buy and the shorter time it will last. This will ultimately cost you more than if you buy a more expensive fertilizer that requires you to use less but feeds your turf far longer.

Good quality broadcast spreader types are the easiest to use and achieve the best results. Avoid getting any fertilizer on paved

surfaces and if you do, blow or sweep the pellets back into the lawn area to avoid potentially staining paved surfaces.

It is also important to apply fertilizer in a manner that can be utilized by the grass and not wasted or cause pollution to our lakes. Many of our paved surfaces drain into lakes and can carry misapplied fertilizers into our waterways during rainfall. All fertilizers are harmful to our lakes so you should always follow Florida's Best Management Practices (BMP) when making fertilizer applications. You can learn more about fertilizing and other Best Management Practices by visiting: <http://tinyurl.com/eypua>

In conclusion, you need to determine several things before you apply fertilizer. Have you purchased the desired blend? Are you going to apply the right rate evenly so that you achieve an even, rich color that you desire while avoiding damage to the lawn from applying too much fertilizer? And most importantly, are you avoiding any detrimental environmental impact?

In 2009, Orange County passed a new fertilizer ordinance that applies to anyone making applications of fertilizer to lawns in Orange County. This new ordinance can be viewed on our resource page.

Pest Control:

A certain level of expertise is required to properly identify the different pests that can harm our St. Augustinegrass turf before you decide to use a pesticide. You can view pests that damage St. Augustinegrass by visiting:

<http://www.buginfo.com>

Proper identification of insects, diseases and weeds will help you decide if a pesticide is required and if so which one should be used. You need to read and understand the label before making any application of pesticides. There are several things you can do to reduce the need for pesticides on your site. These include proper watering, mowing, fertilizing, reducing traffic where possible, and avoiding any other stress to the grass.

Any pesticides that are unused in an application should be stored safely away from children, always kept in their original container with the label attached, and never disposed improperly by pouring them into a sink drain or body of water. If you are unsure about what you are attempting to control, you should consult or hire a professional.

Change Your View and Perspective:

Contrary to what most lawn care companies will tell you, lawns will still have problems from time to time while under their care. It is also not uncommon for lawns to require resodding in areas from time to time, even while receiving proper service from a professional chemical lawn care company. This is because chemical lawn care only provides some of the requirements that turfgrass needs. Turfgrass can still die from improper mowing, drought, freeze damage, uncontrollable diseases, nematodes, uncontrollable weed infestations and other causes for turfgrass decline that a chemical lawn care company cannot control and therefore will not be responsible for covering should damage occur.

If you think your lawn doesn't look as good as you think it should, or it is not as green as your neighbors across the street, try walking across the street to view your lawn. There is no such thing as the perfect lawn and sometimes we see things up close that isn't apparent from further away. You will probably find several things wrong with your neighbor's lawn up close that were not visible from your home across the street. Having a completely weed-free residential St. Augustinegrass lawn that looks like a closely mowed Bermudagrass hybrid that you play golf on is an unrealistic goal. **Remember, the grass is always greener on the other side of the street!**

FREE DOCTOR'S EXAM Will Tell You What it Takes to Make Your Lawn the Envy of the Neighborhood.

Thank you for taking the time to read our e-book about creating an emerald green lawn that you can be proud of owning.

So many of the people we talk to have questions about their lawn and what it takes to make it look fantastic. That's why we put together this book. But even with the latest and greatest information achieving a trouble, weed and pest free lawn is difficult, expensive and time consuming.

The Solution is Simple

Call us and invite one of our degreed horticulturists to come out and perform a rigorous examination on your lawn. We will provide our analysis that will give you an accurate picture of your lawns overall health and what it will take for it to become the **lush, green oasis that will be the envy of the block.**

While we're there, **ask us any questions you have** about your lawn, landscape plants or soil. We love to talk about our passion, Central Florida Landscape.

When we're finished with our meticulous examination, we will write a **custom prescription** just for you and your lawn. We do this because we know the challenges, time constraints, and stress that lawn care can impose on you.

We are dedicated to making the lives of Central Florida residents like you better by providing not only a premium lawn care service that saves you time but gives you outstanding results at a competitive price. We've been doing this for over 30 years and we'll be glad do it for you!

The DOCTOR'S EXAM is FREE and extremely valuable. **This exam is not for the casual home owner.**

This exam is for homeowners who are serious about taking the necessary steps to having a **thick and vibrant St. Augustine lawn** that provides a safe and beautiful place for your family and pets.

Call 407-422-3641

Don't hesitate! Get your **FREE DOCTOR'S EXAM** now. **It costs you nothing** but could save you hours of frustration, aggravation, stress and headaches not to mention your hard earned cash.

Our people are **plant experts not salespeople**, so don't ask them about scare tactics or high pressure as they are uneducated in that department. These are professional men of science and **do not work on commission**. They get paid whether you take advantage of what they are offering and sign up with Dr. Jack's or not. Almost every lawn care company hires salesmen on commission that will tell you just about anything to get you to sign up with them because they don't get paid unless you take their service. Once these salesmen sell you on their service, you never see them again. Good luck trying to get the technician who begins servicing your lawn to live up to the salesman's promises!

When you call Dr. Jack's for your **FREE DOCTOR'S EXAM**, you will be inviting one of **Central Florida's finest horticulturists** to your home that will be able to answer any questions you have about your lawn related issues. At Dr. Jack's we have **Central Florida Lawns "Down to a Science."**

Call for you FREE DOCTOR'S EXAM now.

Sincerely,

Rick Reinhardt

President Dr. Jack's

407-422-3641

P.S. Call for your **FREE DOCTOR'S EXAM** now while it's still fresh in your mind. Get real solutions without the expensive trial and error. These exams book up fast so call immediately to ensure you are not put on a waiting list. Call 407-422-3641 or visit www.greengrassnow.com