

Saving Water Long Term – Planting Seeded Bermudagrass

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Warm-season grasses, including bermudagrass, can use less water than cool-season species such as tall fescue, Kentucky bluegrass or perennial ryegrass after they are established. However, bermudagrass, whether seeded or vegetative, must be established during the late spring to summer and during establishment will require more water than established cool-season turf during this grow-in period. Bermudagrass can also not be used in sites with significant shade or in more northern areas. Part of the water savings comes during the winter when bermudagrass will be dormant and brown which may not be acceptable for some uses.

Total Conversion from Tall Fescue, Kentucky Bluegrass or Perennial ryegrass to Bermudagrass (most successful).

The original grass needs to be green and actively growing and soil temperatures should be at least 65 Degrees F (18 degrees C), usually when air temperatures are above 80 degrees F (27 degrees C). Do not mow for 1 to 2 weeks.

1. Spray with glyphosate at recommended rate.
2. Mow existing turf short and aerify if possible.
3. Add fertility based on soil test and correct any soil or drainage problems.
4. Drop seed or use slit seeder set no deeper than 1/8 inch at 2 to 3 lbs / 1000 sq. ft (10-15 gr/ sq. m).
5. Cover with thin layer of topsoil or compost.
6. Irrigation should be applied to keep the surface evenly damp, not saturated (short irrigations 4 to 6 times per day)
7. Germination will occur over 7 to 14 days depending on temperatures. As the cool season grass dies the bermudagrass will become established so green cover is maintained.
8. Start reducing irrigation once good establishment is observed and initiate mowing at 0.5 to 1 inch
9. Herbicides should be applied for weed control if necessary
10. Apply 1 lb. of nitrogen per 1000 sq. ft. after emergence and monthly during grow in.



Conversion without glyphosate (less effective)

1. Let the cool season grass go dormant by not watering for 2 to 4 weeks (make sure you apply some water to any trees in the turf area).
2. Follow steps 5 to 11 above, initiating mowing as soon as possible to reduce competition.
3. The cool season grass will recover so less bermudagrass will be present. Manage the turf for the warm season turf after the bermudagrass is mature.
4. Additional herbicides can be used to remove the cool season grass completely if desired including metsulfuron during the growing season and glyphosate when the bermudagrass is dormant.

After it is well established bermudagrass has been documented to provide all the benefits of cool season turf, including cooling, reducing dust and providing a playing surface while using less water. Uniform, efficient application of irrigation water is required to realize these savings. Bermudagrass is not adapted to heavily shaded sites and only cultivars such as Yukon have adequate cold tolerance for more Northern sites.