

Turf-Type Seeded Bermudagrass Seedhead Formation Concerns

Turfgrass managers often have concerns about planting a seeded bermudagrass variety on their project, rather than a vegetative sod or sprigged variety. “Seedheads” and possible seed formation are often mentioned as specific concerns. Information is presented below to reduce these concerns, for project managers and architects considering the use of certified seeded bermudagrass products such as Yukon, Riviera, SR9554, LaPALOMA or LaPRIMA Blend.

The formation of blooms (commonly called seedheads) is often mentioned as a concern of turfgrass managers, due to possible seed formation, and also due to possible pollen and allergy concerns. This is not a factor when these turf-type bermudagrass varieties are kept mowed and maintained as an attractive, healthy turf. Seedheads are rarely found on an improved bermudagrass turf project that is receiving regular maintenance, turf care and mowing - well cared for golf course, sports field, park or home lawn.

Under lower levels of care and maintenance, all varieties of bermudagrass turf will be inclined to bloom more and show more seedheads — this includes the vegetative or hybrid varieties. But, even under these poorer care situations, the bermudagrass blooms need a minimum of three weeks unmowed to produce any viable seed that might be tracked elsewhere on the turf project. Generally seed set and production is quite low in these turf situations, and any seed that is produced will be low viability. Mowing the turf surface below 5 inches in height will remove any seedheads that do appear, before any seed is actually produced.

Bermudagrass blooms and actual production of seed are enhanced by stress. Poor soil fertility, drought or low moisture conditions, cooler late summer temperatures, high levels of salinity, disease or insect pressure, and shorter day length are conditions that will generally promote the formation of blooms (seedheads) on all bermudagrass varieties. Since most turf sites are not maintained this poorly, it is obvious that the turf manager has very definite control over the seedhead production on his project. Regular mowing (at least once per week in season), moderate and regular fertilizer applications, adequate soil moisture, and reduced mowing heights (3/4 - 1 1/2 inches) will generally eliminate this problem.

Under the relatively high humidity levels present on a well maintained turf site, seed development is very poor in the bermudagrass florets (blooms - seedheads). In fact, over 95% of the world's bermudagrass seed supply is produced in the Desert Southwest of the United States, where growing conditions are far less humid than most turfgrass situations.

Certified Turf-Type Bermudagrasses have many advantages that far outrank any remote chance of the grass producing seed on a turfgrass project. One benefit is the reduced number of seedheads evident in maintained turf plots of superior turf-type varieties, under national testing, when compared to common bermudagrass. One major benefit to using these seeded bermudas is the fact that these grass varieties are actually propagated from seed. This makes the planting and establishment of a new turf area much faster and far less expensive than planting a vegetative variety using sod, stolons or plugs. In the Certified seed production fields in Arizona and California, the bermudagrass plants are regularly stressed for higher seed production, and allowed to grow to a height of 16 to 20 inches for better yield and easier harvest of the seed - stress increases the bloom count. Under any normal or even moderate level of turfgrass maintenance, it is very rare to see many seedheads or expect viable seed production on a turfgrass project.