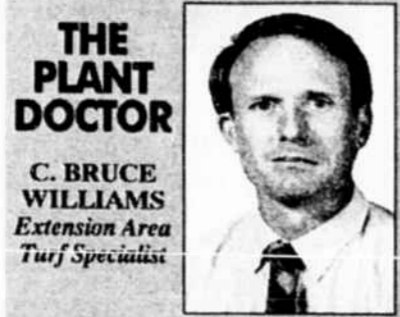


On A Quest For The Perfect Lawn; Secrets Revealed

1. Do you want to have the best looking lawn in the neighborhood?
2. Do any imperfections (small weeds, off-color grasses, or small bare ground areas) in your lawn drive you crazy?
3. Do you demand perfection of your lawn?
4. Do moles, ants, insects, snakes and other critters digging or playing in your landscape disturb you?
5. Is working 8 hours to 12 hours a week on your lawn your idea of having fun?
6. Do you exhibit an obsessive-compulsive behavior concerning your lawn?



THE PLANT DOCTOR
C. BRUCE WILLIAMS
Extension Area
Turf Specialist

If you answered yes to any of the above questions, then you may want to continue reading to find out the "secret to the perfect lawn" in south-eastern North Carolina.

But beware, a perfect lawn can be hazardous to your pocketbook.

The "Secret" of a Perfect Lawn

The road to a perfect lawn is paved with work, and the very first step is choosing the best adapted grass for your location.

According to comments from readers and my own observations, the perfect lawn should be dark green, fine-textured, uniform (in color and texture), have no bare spots, weeds or noxious critters (such as fire ants), look beautiful year-round, and require little maintenance. If artificial turf is ruled out, then that leaves us with the following lawn grasses.

Our guidelines would eliminate centipede and carpet grasses (too yellow-green, too coarse-textured), St. Augustine (too coarse-textured), bahia (too coarse and difficult to mow), and common bermuda grass (too invasive). None of the cool season grasses (such as Kentucky Bluegrass, tall fescue, fine fescue, bent grass, or perennial rye grass) are acceptable for a year-round lawn in eastern North Carolina due to disease susceptibility and poor tolerance of summer heat.

The only warm season grasses remaining are hybrid bermuda and zoysia. Only these grasses will produce a "perfect" lawn based upon our guidelines.

Hybrid bermuda grass (*Cynodon dactylon*) cultivars adapted for lawn use include Tifton 419, Tifway or Tifway II, Tifton 328, Tifgreen, and Tifdwarf are also super quality cultivars of bermuda grass but require even more maintenance and are slightly more prone to winter damage.

All bermuda grasses, common or hybrid, can be killed by prolonged exposure to winter weather, frequent heavy late spring frosts, poor soil fertility, improper mowing height, insects, diseases, nematodes, excessive wear, shade or a combination of any of the above. Shade is especially tough on bermuda grass because the plant is slowly weakened and thinned out before being overtaken by a disease or insect problem. Bermuda grass is also susceptible to cold damage, and in light of the recent arctic freeze we encountered, I am certain to see many cold-related "dead" spots in lawns and golf courses in April and May.

The zoysia grasses (*Zoysia sp.*) are more cold-tolerant and shade-tolerant but have other problems the bermudas do not. Common cultivars available include Meyer (aka Z-52 or Amazoy) Emerald, Cashmere and El-Toro. Emerald and Cashmere are the finest textured and are considered to be the finest of the fine.

Emerald has demonstrated greater disease tolerance than Cashmere in cultivar variety trials. Meyer is slightly more coarse textured than Emerald. El-Toro is a new variety from California that looks very much like Meyer but grows as rapidly as bermuda grass.

All cultivars of hybrid bermuda and zoysia grass should be mowed

at three-quarters of an inch to one inch at least one to three times a week with a reel-type mower during the growing season. Rotary mowers cannot cut grass closer than one inch without excessive scalping.

Healthy zoysia grass can be stirred and "beaten down" but not cut with the average rotary mower. Never cut more than 30 percent of the leaf blade off with any mowing (this applies to all grasses) because this routine defoliation will weaken the stand and make your lawn more prone to disease and insect infestation.

A modern, well-designed irrigation system is an absolute requirement for the perfect lawn. Without irrigation a hybrid bermuda grass or zoysia grass lawn will look no better (and may look worse) than your neighbors' yards.

Plan on applying one-half inch to one inch of irrigation water per

week during the summer. In sandy soils, the application of one-half inch of water every two or three days may be required during the peak summer months. Optimum time for application of irrigation water is during the early morning. A late afternoon syringing (a brief irrigation of 5 minutes to 10 minutes) may be necessary in very sandy soils during extreme heat (above 95 degrees Fahrenheit).

Hybrid bermuda grass must be fertilized often to maintain the vigor, color and texture required of a perfect lawn. Using a fertilizer like 15-5-10 or 16-4-8 (containing a slow-release form of nitrogen), apply five to seven pounds per 1,000 square feet every four to six weeks beginning in April and continuing until the first of September. Zoysia grass requires the same type of fertilizer but less. Apply five pounds of 16-4-8 (or equivalent) per 1,000 square feet in April, June and August.

Remember that your soil must have the proper base fertility and soil pH to receive optimum results from these recommendations.

Soil test kits and a soil analysis can be obtained free from any North Carolina Cooperative Extension office.

Healthy, vigorous lawns of hybrid bermuda grass and zoysia grass grow. This means your lawn will accumulate thatch. Thatch is a layer of dead organic matter between the soil and the living mat of turf grass. Grass clippings do not significantly contribute to thatch build-up; rather, the clippings are just an accumulation of dead stems and roots produced by healthy grass.

In order to maintain the perfect lawn, plan to core aerify and/or verticut your lawn every two years to

remove excessive thatch (although annual verticutting and aerification is preferred). If thatch is not removed, healthy stands of hybrid bermuda or zoysia grass are quickly (within two to four years) thinned by disease, insects, drought and cold weather. Verticutting and aerification are best performed during the growing season (May through September) when the lawn can rapidly recover from this harsh cultivation practice.

Weed, insect, disease and pest (critter) management practices may be required for the perfect lawn—even if you have done everything else just right. Stay tuned for more on managing the "perfect lawn".

Send your garden questions and comments to The Plant Doctor, P.O. Box 109, Bolivia, N.C. 28422.

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Lay's Tombstone Original Pizzas **2/\$5.99** 12" All Flavors

Planter's Mixed Nuts **\$2.99** 14.5 Oz. With Peanuts

Pepsi Cola **\$5.95** 24 Pack/12 Oz. Cans

Prices in this ad good Wednesday, Jan. 26 thru Tues., Feb. 1, 1994. We Reserve The Right To Limit Quantities.

Girl Scouts Kick Off Cookie Sale

Local Girl Scouts kicked off their annual cookie sale last Saturday with the 1994 Cookie Rally at Camp Pretty Pond's Pine Lodge at Boiling Spring Lakes.

More than 100 scouts and leaders gathered at the camp to get in the spirit for this year's campaign.

Troops performing various songs, cheers and skits included Troop 735 of Long Beach, Troop 936 of Shallotte, Troop 870 of Shallotte, Brownie Troop 186 of Boiling Spring Lakes, Troop 833 of Long Beach, Troop 124 of Bolivia and Troop 227 of Winnabow.

Cookies cost \$2.50 per box. Varieties include thin mints, shortbread, peanut butter patties, peanut butter sandwich, caramel delights (formerly Samoas), lemon pastry cremes and a new cookie called strawberries 'n creme.

Girl Scouts will continue taking orders through Feb. 6. Cookies will be delivered between Feb. 26 and March 18.

For more information, call Karen Prine, service unit cookie manager, at 910-845-2483.

Cloggers Compete Feb. 19

The Columbus County Cloggers will host a "Hog Wild '94" members Valentine's Day theme party Saturday, Feb. 19, in Whiteville for the North Carolina Clogging Council Inc.

non-members. Additional fees are charged for mini-competitions.

For more information contact Jimmy Watson at 910-371-6291.

Reunion Planned

The Acme-Delco High School Class of 1974 will meet to plan its 20th year class reunion on Feb. 19.

The meeting will take place at 6 p.m. at Sandpiper Seafood and Steak House in Leland. All members are being asked to attend and to RSVP by Feb. 14 to Lynda Nichols Young at 371-1554.

Held at the N.C. National Guard Armory on N.C. 130 West, the party will feature exhibitions, mountain dancing, line dances, a mini-workshop and mini-competitions that are preliminaries for state clogging competition.

General admission is \$1 for current council members and \$3 for

Shallotte Moose Lodge #710 Talent Show
February 6, 4:00 pm
Tickets \$5.00 each • On sale now at Shallotte Moose Lodge, Music Box or at the door (if available)
Holden Beach Road • Shallotte
For more information call 754-2786

KERR Drug Stores NOTICE KERR Drug Stores
We regret to inform our customers that a misprint in our January 26th through January 30th circular on page 4 lists the following 4 price points as being OFF instead of EACH. We apologize for any inconvenience to our customers.

1. Aspen Cologne Spray for Men 2oz. 7.99 OFF Should read EACH
2. Empire Angle Brooms #62-2498 2.49 OFF Should read EACH
3. Empire Economy Sponge Mops #32-2494 2.97 OFF Should read EACH
4. Empire Dust Mop #32-3901 2.99 OFF Should read EACH