

Growing Centipede Takes Patience

Dear Plant Doctor: I received a pamphlet from your office on centipede grass. I requested it because I had concerns on when centipede should be fertilized. It says June is the time. Most of my neighbors have already fertilized and their grass is greening nicely. Mine is green but not the dark green as a result of the fertilizer doing its job.



It would seem that centipede would need something after the winter to get started and then maybe a pick-me-up in middle summer. I know centipede does not need much nitrogen but maybe a fertilizer with little or no nitrogen and iron would help green it up. I have used iron from the bottle and sprayed it on the lawn but it has never done anything that I could tell.

I just think June is too late to wait to fertilize my centipede grass!

—Wilmington

Answer: Extension brochures on lawn care are guides based upon scientific research. Centipede grass fertilized early in the spring is more prone to brown patch, frost damage and other pest damage. Centipede grass fertilized incorrectly on an annual basis will decline and usually die in three to five years due to winter damage, disease or other problems. Some turfgrass scientists believe that the second application of a low nitrogen-high potassium fertilizer in August benefits centipede grass growth and survival. However, little consensus exists among the experts. My observations and research indicate very little fertilizer is required for optimum centipede grass maintenance—the least fertilizer is best.

If you are not seeing a response to iron, then you may have another nutrient problem. Take a soil sample from your lawn to the New Hanover County Cooperative Extension Service office. Request that a "problem soil sample analysis" be performed by the N.C. Department of Agriculture soil testing laboratory and that a copy of the results be sent to me.

Dark green centipede grass early in the spring usually signals the early demise of a centipede grass home lawn. Stick to your guns and wait

until June to fertilize your centipede grass. You will be cutting grass next year while your neighbors sweep their yards.

Dear Plant Doctor: I would like to establish centipede grass in the yard of my new home but want to have a lawn by this summer. A landscaper suggested that I seed tall fescue with the centipede grass. What do you think?—Lumberton

Answer: I think that is a rotten idea.

Centipede grass is relatively slow to establish. Germinating tall fescue seeds will compete for water and nutrients with the germinating centipede grass seed at the seeding rate used on home lawns. I suggest you consider one or a combination of the following options to rapidly establish centipede grass:

1. Sod. Without doubt, the fastest method of lawn establishment. If finances are a major consideration (they usually are), then sod your lawn on the installment plan. Sod high priority areas first. Seed other areas with a temporary grass cover like rye grass or tall fescue or carpet grass. When you have the resources to move on to phase two, then soil test, plow under the temporary grass, add the required amendments, prepare the soil and lay the sod.

2. Plug. Plugging is for the patient and hardworking. The time needed to establish a new lawn of centipede grass using plugs depends upon the growing conditions and the spacing of grass plugs. I have seen many beautiful lawns established by plugging centipede grass into an existing lawn of tall fescue, St. Augustine, bermuda or carpet grass. Fertilize,

mow and cultivate the lawn as if it were all centipede grass. Plugs spaced on one-foot centers are standard. That means it will take 8,000 plugs to establish the average 8,000 square foot lawn. For the new lawn, an irrigated and newly plugged centipede grass lawn will usually cover in one full growing season (May to September). The establishment of a new centipede grass lawn by plugging without irrigation can take two years or more.

Centipede grass likes acid soil so be sure soil pH is suitable. Soil test!

3. Sprig. Lawn establishment by sprigging takes roughly the same time to establish as with seeding.

4. Seed. I have seen homeowners with good irrigation systems establish centipede grass lawns by seed in one growing season; however, they are the exception. In the average unirrigated lawn, centipede grass establishment will normally take two or three years for full coverage. A seeding rate of four ounces of centipede grass per 1,000 square feet is usually a good compromise between seed costs and time required for establishment. Heavier seeding rates will accelerate coverage but the cost is usually prohibitive. For more rapid coverage see above comments about sodding or plugging.

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



STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER

Friends Earn Top Honors

The 200-member Friends of the West Brunswick Branch Library in Shallotte won first place in the 300-membership or less division of the 1993 Frances B. Reid Memorial Award competition sponsored by the Friends of North Carolina Public Libraries to honor outstanding friends groups. Shown with the award above are (from left) Phyllis Manning, who accepted the award, and officers Sue McCann, Blanche Bechtle and John Twomey. The West Brunswick Friends group was cited for its successful campaign to keep the branch open in temporary quarters when the county library planned to close the facility for four to six months for renovation. The Friends raised approximately \$10,000, rented space in Resort Plaza, help pack up books and move, and recruited volunteer staff members.

Take GED Tests During June To Earn High School Diploma

GED test dates are scheduled throughout June for Brunswick County residents who want to complete their high school diploma.

Brunswick Community College will offer all GED tests, except the writing one, at its main campus north of Supply Tuesdays, June 14 at 1 p.m. and June 28 at 5 p.m.

The same group of tests will be offered at BCC's Southport campus, on North Lord Street, Thursday, June 16, at 5 p.m., and then at BCC's Leland campus Wednesday, June 15, at 9 a.m.

All tests, including writing, will be given at the Leland campus Wednesday, June 1, at 9 a.m., and at the Southport campus Thursday, June 2, at 5 p.m.

The writing skills test only will administered Tuesday, June 7, on the BCC main campus near Supply.

Students who want to prepare to take the GED tests may enter GED classes at Brunswick Community College any time.

Also, individual help in preparing for the tests is available at the learning lab, located on the main campus. Drop-ins are welcome. For lab hours or more information about the GED, contact BCC at 754-6900 or 343-0203, Ext. 334.

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