

Killing Bermudagrass Before Re-Seeding A Lawn

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

Depending on your preference, and your point of view, Bermudagrass is either a resilient lawn grass for sunny locations or a scourge you are trying to get rid of. For those not familiar with Bermudagrass (BG) it is a warm season perennial grass that spreads by underground rhizomes and above ground runners. It greens up late in the spring and goes dormant early in the fall. Those characteristics make it highly desirable to some and despised by others. If you have a cool season lawn (fescue or bluegrass) BG can aggressively move in to it from surrounding lawns. It will thrive when it is hot and dry and the cool season grasses tend to go dormant. But BG does need full sun, it won't grow in even partial shade.

If you have BG and you want to get rid of it so you can plant a "nice" cool season lawn, then you need to start now, so you can be ready to plant your grass seed in early September. Simply tilling up a lawn that has BG will not kill it. The rhizomes and runners will simply re-root and keep growing. To get BG killed off requires herbicides and patience. BUT, before you start, look at your neighbors lawns. If they are also full of BG, you are probably fighting a losing battle as the BG will keep trying to move back into your lawns from the edges.

About the only herbicide that is effective on BG is glyphosate, also known as Roundup, Kleenup, Killzall and many other names. Whichever product you get, make sure it only contains glyphosate. This is going to kill everything in your lawn, there's just no other way to do it. You want to make sure that the BG is growing good so that it efficiently takes up the herbicide. If it's been dry, water the lawn to get the BG growing good. Let the plant get some height, about to the stage when you'd be mowing it, and then spray it with the glyphosate. Be careful that you don't get any overspray on desirable vegetation as glyphosate is non-selective.

Now you are going to wait two to three weeks. Glyphosate stops plant growth quickly, but it may be several days before you see any evidence of it working. At two to three weeks you want to mow the dead vegetation as short as you can and water it good again to encourage any BG that isn't dead to shoot up new growth. Wait about a week and then spray it again. It is highly unlikely that you will kill it all with one treatment. After the second spraying, wait another two weeks and then water the lawn if it hasn't been raining. You really want to make sure that none of the BG is still alive. During this period is also a good time to take a soil sample and bring in to the Extension Office so we can analyze it and see if we need to add anything to adjust the soil pH or if you need to apply starter fertilizer.

By this time you should be about to early September and time to plant your fescue or bluegrass. You can till the soil up if you want, but the power seeders that are available for rent usually do a pretty good job of slicing down into the soil and through all those dead roots. It is important that you get the grass seed into the soil. Simply spreading it on the soil surface isn't going to be very effective. Once the seed is in the ground I encourage you to start watering the lawn to get the seed germinated and growing as soon as possible. It's important to get it well established before winter dormancy sets in.

Bermudagrass is praised and loved by some, and wholly hated by others. It all depends on your preferences and your needs. If you are in the latter camp, and want to replace it with your preferred grass though, you better get started now, or you'll wind up with the same mess you already have!