

Ask The Plant Groom™ by Dale Groom, The Plant Groom™

QA1068

Am not sure what I've done, but guess it's been disastrous!! Not sure if it was the lack of water that we were unable to supply it with OR the grub killer we put down OR the weed/seed treatment that we applied. This being done to/on St. Augustine...well, hindsight is great and I guess whatever I did, really 'DID' it, cause the grass looks dead. What is your suggestion to getting my St. Augustine back? This is a yard that had been pretty well taken care of over the past (20+) years, and now really looks sad! There is a 'mat', dead grass, runners, dried grass clippings, etc and I'm needing to know what I should plant and how.

Also worried about these big, ole black birds (cracklings, or something); that if I put seed down they're scarfing it up. We live next to a corn/cotton field and the birds are in numerous supply. Any suggestions on getting them out of my back yard? Even my cats don't bother with them!

Anyway, Mr. Groom, I would like your suggestions as to what I should do to get my back yard back in presentable condition. Do we need to till up the yard...not the easiest of soil to do this to or can we put grass squares down in certain areas and let it spread? Do I need to try and rake or somehow, get up the old dead grass, cuttings, etc before we do anything, or just plant on top/beside? Or what?

Your help would be greatly appreciated and the sooner the better; as we would like to get started on something THIS weekend.

Thank you, VERY much.- R. B.

R. B., Let's take this bit by bit and see where we go.

This past summer and on into the fall was brutal on the landscape as well as us including the air conditioning bill.

St. Augustine is the least tolerant turf grass we grow. It only has stolons or runners with roots above ground. Bermuda grass for example has both stolons and rhizomes. Rhizomes are below the ground creeping stems and serve as survival components if the top of Bermuda grass dies for any reason. St. Augustine grass does not have this ability. So, if the leaves and stolons of St. Augustine grass dies for any reason that section or an entire lawn is ... dead.

If you wish to have a St. Augustine lawn and your current lawn is dead it needs to be replanted from sod, plug or runners/stolons from a source of healthy existing lawn.

Bermuda grass may be planted from seed, plugs, sod or hydromulched. It is for full sun locations only. St. Augustine grass will grow in full sun or shade if it received four hours of sun minimum or its' equivalent.

Now is a good time to plant either grass. This is also ideal time to plant Buffalo grass and/or Zoysia grass varieties that's well adapted.

Crackles may be a problem in some situations. However, I doubt they will be able to see hulled Bermuda grass seed. Our outside cats do keep birds off of our lawn. Perhaps you need to visit with yours. Birds should not be a problem in establishing a new lawn.

If you wish to place sod solid in an area gust mow the existing dead grass as low as possible, level any low areas, place the sod and keep moist. If you decide to plant individual blocks, cut the blocks into smaller sections or commercially grown plugs prepare the area as for solid sodding, install your choice into the ground level at the soil line and keep moist.

The area should be mown as for sodding, tilled, raked, seed broadcast and keep the area moist. The decision on which grass to install and how to plant is yours. Now is an idea time to start from seed, sod, plugs or any other way you wish to plant turf grass.

I do not recommend the use of "weed and feed" on any on any lawn. Fertilize when needed. Utilize weed control aids when needed. Always read and follow label directions when using any gardening aids including fertilizers.

Now that the leaves have come out, I have found two limbs of my 30 year old red oak have died. I can't tell if it goes all the way back to the main trunk but regardless, the two sections that appear dead are large. How do I determine the cause/treatment? - R. C. B.

If the limbs are dead they should be removed. You may wish to contact a consulting arborist for an onsite evaluation.

Dale Groom, Extension Horticulturist-Dallas County, Texas Cooperative Extension, Native Texan, Columnist, Author, Radio/TV Host is also known state wide as The Plant Groom™. Send your lawn, garden or landscape tips to Dale at dalegroom@mycvc.net You may contact a Master Gardener M - F, 8:30 am - 4pm at 214-904-3053 for horticultural assistance.

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