

Ask The Plant Groom(tm) by Dale Groom, The Plant Groom(tm)

QA1102

Two years ago my wife and I sodded a portion of our front yard, about 50 by 30 feet area with centipede grass squares. We laid it over the grass that was already there. We kept it watered sufficiently and it got green and lush. This was early spring and it went dormant when late fall came. It got enough rainfall during the winter months but when spring returned it did not return. We chalked it up to bad grass and re-sodded with St. Augustine after applying a layer of landscape mixture over the dead centipede. Once again with plenty of watering it turned green and lush and when spring returned the St. Augustine did not return. So, for the third time, I had a load of top soil delivered and I spread it evenly over the entire area and we re-sodded for the last time with St. Augustine and, yes, it is green and lush. Can you give me your views on this, what could make the grass not return from dormancy? Like I said this is the last time.

Thank You - L. & C. W

Growing a lawn in Texas sometimes is ... "interesting" and provides something for us to be involved with.

It sounds like the roots of your grass plants were dying during the winter. While we may think there is or in your case was sufficient soil moisture, actually this may not be correct at the root zone.

This winter currently appears to be providing plenty of soil moisture and your grass planting may be ready to rock and roll for you this next spring.

A couple of items please. Top soil does not have any specific specifications. It may be any soil that's scraped off of the top of a location. Always order soil by specific types such as sandy-loam, sandy-clay-loam, clay-loam of other specifications. Sod in proper contact with native soils rarely need any additional soil or amendments to take root and grow well for us. The very best preparation of planting areas for sod is to; eliminate any existing weeds such as nutgrass, Johnson grass and other potential perennial pest weeds for lawns, till the area, add organic matter if desired, till again, hand rake then install the sod However, only step one should be completed to start a new lawn. And in Texas most great looking lawns never follow the remaining steps.

Let's think "positive", the third try produces a lawn that greens up at the expected time here in 2007.

We purchased some Banana trees and Roja Banana plants this spring and they are doing wonderfully. Our question is two actually. First how would you recommend we protect the Banana trees during the cooler temperature months coming up? And secondly, will the Roja Banana plants last the colder temperatures, if protected, or are these a one time thing each year. We have talked to some that just leave the Banana trees and hope for the best.

We have been told to dig them up and store them in the garage. (That not our first choice) We been told to protect them with paper and burlap or sponge wrap. We also have been told to diagonally cut them down about a foot off of the ground and cover with several inches of mulch. We planted them in large tomato wire cages just in case this is true. Also the cages gave them support while they were developing a root base. If it matters the Banana trees are from 5 to 7 feet tall, and the Roja are from 5 to 6 feet tall.

Thank You - M. and S. Y.

When I was a kid some half century ago my dad liked to grow banana trees at our home in Brownwood. What we did then and continues to work today is the following; after the first killing frost or freeze kills the top cut the trunk off at ground level, apply 12" or more of mulch and keep your thoughts positive that it will resprout and grow again when the soil warms in the spring.

My Dad used leaves raked from the yard with a two gallon bucket turned over the top of the leaf mulch with a rock on top of the bucket's bottom. This method worked year after year but like life, there are no guarantees. Do remember, when resprouting of bananas occur there is normally more than one trunk. The original trunk will not regrow. So, your planting will look a little different but if you like these fun to grow tropical plants I think you both will be pleased with the results.

If you all enjoy a "tropical look" spot in the landscape think about adding some summer tropical color to it also. Tropical hibiscus, alamanda, bougainvillea, mandevilla and passions vine add super color to this theme. Remember, all these plants I've just listed are "tropical" which means they must be protected indoors from freeze and frost.

A large shrub/small tree I enjoy that's been in our landscape for (15) years and lends a tropical effect is loquat. It is normally winter hardy in USDA plant hardiness zones 8 and 9. I live in a zone 7 so I'm pushing it's survival. I'm aware it may go away any winter because it's not normally winter hardy in my zone but we have enjoyed it for fifteen years. You may want to look at adding one if a tropical look is what you would like to create.

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