

How to Select and Install Sod



Ecological Turf Tips

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Texas sod producers carefully select the grass varieties they grow and provide high quality sod. The Turfgrass Producers of Texas website (<http://www.txsod.com/>) lists member producers and their grasses. For additional information see Extension publication L-5519, "Turfgrass Selection for Texas" (available at <http://agrilifebookstore.org>).

Turfgrass Species and Varieties

Bermudagrass tolerates drought and traffic but does not grow well in shade. Varieties are available for use as lawns, golf courses and athletic fields. Many improved hybrid bermudagrasses have a finer leaf texture than the common-type varieties. They generally require more maintenance (frequent mowing, more fertilization, etc.) than the common bermudagrasses. Some bermudagrass varieties available as sod are Baby, Celebration, CT-2, Common, GN-1, Grimes EXP, Quickstand, Tifgreen, Tifway, TifSport and Tifton 10.

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Buffalograss is best adapted for areas with low annual rainfall (25 inches or less). When planted in higher rainfall areas, or when watered excessively, buffalograss is easily invaded by other grasses and weeds. It does best in open sun. It makes a good low maintenance lawn turf from Central to West Texas. The more popular sodded varieties include Density, Prairie, Prestige and 609.

Centipedegrass is adapted to East Texas. It is slow-growing, coarse-leaved, and grows well in full sun to light shade; it does not tolerate traffic or prolonged drought. It requires little fertilizer and infrequent mowing. Varieties available as sod include Common and TifBlair.

St. Augustinegrass is the most shade-tolerant of the warm-season turfgrasses. It is used as a lawn grass in most of Texas but is sometimes killed by very cold winters in the northern third of the state. It is less tolerant of prolonged drought than bermudagrass and zoysiagrass but can be grown in Central and West Texas if irrigated. It is well adapted in Southeast Texas. Its maintenance requirement is low to moderate. St. Augustinegrass varieties include Amerishade, Captiva, Delmar, Floratam, Palmetto, Raleigh, Sapphire and Seville.

Zoysiagrass is adapted to a similar area of the state as bermudagrass. Zoysiagrass is drought-tolerant but may turn brown during prolonged drought. It has moderate to good shade tolerance and does well on lawns and moderately trafficked recreational areas. *Zoysia japonica* types are medium-textured and do well with “normal” lawn maintenance. *Zoysia matrella* types have a finer leaf texture, are more shade-tolerant, and need closer mowing. *Z. japonica* varieties include Carrizo, Crowne, El Toro, Empire, GN-Z, Jamur, Meyer and Palisades. *Z. matrella* varieties include Cavalier, Diamond, Royal, Y-2, Zeon, Zorro and Emerald (an older variety similar to *Z. matrella* types).

When Contacting the Grower or Landscaper

Know how many square feet, square yards or pallets of sod you need, allowing for a small percentage of waste that occurs during installation. Sod is sold by the square yard or square foot (1 square yard of sod = 9 square feet; a pallet contains about 450 square feet).

Therefore, 111 square yards of sod are needed per 1,000 square feet. An acre is 43,560 square feet or 4,840 square yards.

Determine the services provided beyond the delivery of sod from the farm or distribution site. Do not assume the grower or landscaper will also do site grading, fertilization, installation and post-installation work. Once you select a grower, distributor or landscaper, call as far ahead of installation time as possible to ensure that sod will be ready when you need it.

Site Preparation

Sod survives best when planted on well prepared soil that is relatively moist. Follow the recommendations in B-6239, "Turfgrass Establishment in Texas" (<http://agrillifebookstore.org>).

Installing Sod

Sod is perishable and is best installed within 36 hours of harvest. Lightly rake the area to be sodded just before planting. Lay the first line of sod along a straight line such as a driveway, sidewalk, or a string stretched between two stakes. Then stagger the sod pieces in the adjacent rows in "brickwork" fashion. Push the sod pieces together tightly as they may shrink if allowed to dry out before rooting. Try to minimize soil compaction and ruts in the planting area by moving sod in wheelbarrows over plywood boards. Roll the installed sod with a heavy hand roller to reduce air pockets and ensure the uniform soil contact needed for good rooting. Immediately after planting, water the sod thoroughly until the soil is wet to a depth of 4 inches. Examine the soil under several pieces of sod to make sure it is wet.

Maintaining New Sod

To encourage rooting, water every 2 to 3 days or just often enough to make sure the soil is moist (not wet) to a depth of 3 to 4 inches. Warm-season grasses sodded in late fall or winter may not be well rooted until spring and may need watering until spring rooting begins. In hotter weather (above 80 degrees F), new sod may need watering daily until it is well rooted.

After the sod is well rooted, irrigate deeply and infrequently. This will help the grass roots grow deep into the soil and make the grass more drought-tolerant. Begin mowing the sod as soon as it is rooted and is being watered less frequently. Heavy mowers may cause ruts if grass is mowed too soon or the soil is not firmed before planting.

For more information on turfgrass selection, establishment and care, visit the Texas AgriLife Extension Bookstore (<http://agrilifebookstore.org>).



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