



Tony Glover
Regional Extension Agent
News Release

Overseeding with Ryegrass

Question: My lawn looks terrible after this summer's drought. If I overseed with winter ryegrass will my grass be damaged further?

Answer: One of the main disadvantages of warm-season turfgrasses is their winter appearance and this year the summer appearance was not much better. These grasses lose color and slow their growth in the fall and go into dormancy after the first frost and are brown until spring. However, up until the first killing frost the grass will continue to produce food reserves that help the plant overwinter better and recover from summer drought stress. Planting a cool-season grass in the fall, or overseeding, provides a green, growing cover during the winter but it is not good for the warm-season grass. Having a nice green lawn in the winter sounds great but there are some potential problems you should be aware.

It's important to remember that growing an overseeded grass during the winter is a stress on the underlying warm-season grass. This is especially important this year after an extreme drought. If you were not able to keep your grass well watered and actively growing all summer (and who could?) you may want to think twice about overseeding. The reason your warm-season grass is further stressed is because winter grass is planted well before the permanent grass goes dormant in the fall, depriving it of the last month or so of its normal growing season by shading it out and competing with it.

Another reason to avoid overseeding comes next spring, when the warm-season grass is breaking dormancy and starting to grow. If an overseed grass is present, it competes for light, water and nutrients with the underlying grass, and can set back the growth of the warm-season grass significantly compared to non-overseeded lawns. For this reason, it is very difficult to achieve good results year in and year out when overseeding zoysiagrass (especially Emerald zoysiagrass) or centipedegrass. These grasses are relatively slow growing and do not recover from overseeding nearly as well as bermudagrass. Bermudagrass, with its aggressive growth, best tolerates yearly overseeding but this is a year I would skip even if you normally overseed your bermudagrass successfully. I consulted with James Horton at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens (BBG) and he strongly agrees with these suggestions. In addition to his experience here at the BBG he is the current president of the Alabama Turfgrass Association and has a great deal of experience with overseeding.

James is one of the excellent instructors that helps teach the Master Gardener course that the Extension System offers each year. This reminds me to encourage those of you who are interested in taking the Master Gardener course to complete your application before

mid October for Jefferson County (the St. Clair County class begin back in September). The Master Gardener course is a 13 week program to train people in basic horticulture skills with the goal of using the knowledge gained to improve our community through volunteer service. You may get more information and an application online at: www.jeffcomg.org or send me an email at gloveta@auburn.edu. If you would like information about the Master Gardener program in your area send me a note and I will put you in touch with your local program coordinator.

For more about this topic please contact Tony Glover, Regional Extension Agent-Home Horticulture, Home Gardens and Home Pest Management at the St. Clair County Extension Office at (205) 338-9416 or email gloveta@auburn.edu.

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