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ZOYSIA GRASS

FOR ILLINOIS LAWNS

By H. R. Kemmerer
and F. F. Weinard

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JUL 2 1957



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MEYER ZOYSIA DOES WELL IN ILLINOIS

A warm-weather grass, Zoysia is commonly used in the southern part of the United States. A new hybrid strain, Meyer Z-52 Zoysia, has done well in southern and central Illinois, although it does not grow very fast in the northern part of the state.

A mature stand of Meyer Zoysia looks somewhat like Kentucky bluegrass. However, the Zoysia is considerably stiffer and does not grow quite so tall, reaching a maximum height of about 8 inches when unclipped. The creeping stems (stolons) of Zoysia form a dense sod in summer. As a result, it competes well with weeds, particularly crabgrass, and it resists wear.

A disadvantage of Meyer Zoysia is that it takes one or two years to become established. The grass also becomes dormant in winter; that is, it turns brown with the first severe frost in fall and stays brown until late April or early May. This means an unattractive lawn during winter and early spring. Bluegrass, on the other hand, stays green longer in the fall and turns green again in early spring.

A more complete listing of the advantages and disadvantages of Zoysia is given on the back of this folder.

A backyard grass

Meyer Zoysia should not be considered as a substitute for Kentucky bluegrass, but rather as a supplement where bluegrass does not do too well. Zoysia is a backyard grass, being especially adaptable for areas that receive heavy wear, such as play and service areas.

Because of its brown color in winter and early spring, it isn't a good foreground for early-blooming shrubs and bulbs. Nor should it be used where it can be seen from a picture window.

Planting the Zoysia lawn

Meyer Zoysia is sold in round plugs of sod, 2 or 2½ inches in diameter; or in 1-foot wide strips which can be separated into sprigs of the stolons. No seed is available because Meyer Zoysia, like other hybrids, does not breed true.

Plugs. Meyer Zoysia is usually planted in the form of plugs. These are readily available from nurserymen and garden shops. When buying plugs, be sure they are moist and well supplied with stolons.

You can set out the plugs any time from March 1 to September 15 in Illinois. Since Zoysia spreads fastest when not competing with other grasses, it is advisable to prepare the area to be plugged as you would a seedbed (see Illinois Circular 729).

Set the plugs at 1-foot intervals and water heavily after planting. Be sure the upper 2 inches of soil are kept moist for the first 2 or 3 weeks. It isn't necessary to water every day; however, liberal daily waterings will mean quicker development of a thick sod.

Sprigs. "Sprigging" is less expensive than planting plugs. It is best done in the spring. The sprigs should be fresh and moist.

Dig trenches, 2 to 2½ inches deep and 6 to 8 inches apart, in a well-prepared moist bed. Dip the sprigs in water, then set them in the trenches at 2- to 6-inch intervals. Press the soil firmly around the sprigs. Some part of the sprig must be above ground — preferably a joint with leaves. If the sprigs have no leaves, a naked joint will do. However, do not plant too shallowly, or the sprigs will dry out and die.

Water the newly planted area heavily, and continue daily waterings until active growth appears.

Fertilizer

Zoysia won't need fertilizer other than that required in seedbed preparation until one month after planting. At that time, and at any time thereafter that the grass appears yellowish, nitrogen should be applied. Materials such as urea, ammonium nitrate, ammonium sulfate, or sodium nitrate may be used. A suggested rate is 5 pounds of ammonium sulfate, or 1 pound of actual nitrogen, per 1,000 square feet.

Weed control

Since Meyer Zoysia does not form a thick sod until a year or more after planting, weed control during the first year is a problem. Pulling weeds by hand gives good control, but is of course hard work. Fortunately, several effective weed killers are available.

Di-sodium methyl arsenate can be used to control crabgrass. Make two applications, a week apart, beginning in early June as soon as the crabgrass seeds germinate. Two more applications may be needed later in the summer if more seedlings appear. If the soil is dry and the weather warm, use 2 ounces in 2½ gallons of water for every 1,000 square feet. In wet cool weather, use 3 ounces.

Broadleaf weeds, such as dandelion and plantain, can be pretty well controlled with 2,4-D. Spray with 1 ounce or 2 tablespoonfuls of an amine salt of 2,4-D in 2 gallons of water for every 1,000 square feet. Be careful when spraying, so that you won't injure flowering shrubs and other garden plants.

Soil fumigants (materials which will kill weed seeds in the soil before they germinate) are proving successful on an experimental basis. However, no simple method of fumigating the home lawn has as yet been perfected.

Mowing

Meyer Zoysia needs continual close clipping to develop into an attractive sod. Clipping to a 1½-inch height (as recommended for bluegrass) is probably most practical. However, clipping to a 1-inch height is not harmful. And in early spring the grass can be cut as short as ½ inch. This will loosen dead leaves and other debris so that they can be removed with a rake or grass catcher, permitting early spring growth to be seen earlier.

Zoysia clippings don't decay easily. If left on the lawn, they're likely to form a thick mat-like thatch, making it hard for air and water to penetrate the soil. Therefore, they must be removed. A clipping catcher on the lawn mower is satisfactory for this purpose.

Watering

As already mentioned, plugs or sprigs should be kept moist for 2 or 3 weeks after planting. Then, for a year, 1 or 2 inches of water a week are needed to insure the spread of the stolons. After that, watering isn't necessary except during extreme drouths, but it is desirable.

EMERALD — A NEW HYBRID

Emerald, a relatively new Zoysia hybrid, is a dark green grass very much like Meyer, but with a finer leaf. Little is known about its hardiness under Illinois conditions, although it has survived well in experimental plots.

The prime advantage of Emerald is that it may be clipped as close as ½ inch throughout the season. Under superior management it produces a very dense, high-quality lawn. However, like Meyer, it browns off during the winter. It is somewhat slower-growing than Meyer.

ADVANTAGES OF ZOYSIA

Once established, it competes strongly with crabgrass.

It stays green during drouth periods when Kentucky bluegrass burns out; however, whether it is better than Merion and some of the other improved strains of bluegrass is not certain.

It has no known diseases or insect pests in Illinois.

Unmowed, it remains vegetative and green since it does not produce abundant seed. So its development won't be seriously harmed if you miss a mowing or two, although its attractiveness will be impaired.

The dormant sod is tough and is undamaged by ordinary traffic.

Zoysia may be mowed more closely than bluegrass. This is particularly desirable if you want a rug type of lawn surface.

DISADVANTAGES AND LIMITATIONS

Zoysia is expensive to establish.

During its first year it will bear little or no traffic.

It turns brown at the first frost and remains dormant until late the following spring.

During its dormant period it is a potential fire hazard. A lighted cigarette butt can set it on fire.

It does not spread well in established bluegrass lawns. This is why a seedbed should be prepared before plugs are planted.

Unless trimmed back, it spreads into cultivated flower beds; however, it is not as bad in this respect as southern Bermuda grass.

It does not thrive in shade.