

Flagler County Extension Service  
Horticulture Department  
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Subject: St Augustine lawns

Most people in Flagler County have St Augustine lawns. Many of us displaced northerners are discouraged because our Florida lawns are not as nice as we had up north. Conditions are different and more severe and the grasses we can grow are different. St Augustine lawns can grow in many soil types, are salt tolerant, some cultivars are relatively shade tolerant (Bitterblue, Seville, Amerishade), and have a dark green color, dense sod and an excellent appearance. Disadvantages are that it is subject to chinch bug attack, has a coarse texture, seed is not available for establishment, it can have thatch buildup with poor care, and has high maintenance requirements. The key to a thick, lush lawn is to keep it healthy by using good cultural practices.

## **MOWING**

Mow St Augustine lawns approximately 3 1/2 inches high. Cutting high leaves a canopy that protects the roots from the hot sun and drying out, and more plant surface to support the turf, promoting more runners and plant growth for a fuller lawn. Scalping the turf exposes the roots to the sun, causing the soil and the roots to dry out more quickly and saps the strength of the grass.

Mow when the grass is dry and often to remove only a small portion of the grass blade. Try not to cut more than 1/3 of the grass blade at one time to avoid stressing the turf. This may require mowing more than once per week during high growth periods. If your grass is six inches tall, do not cut shorter than four inches. Cut again soon to lower it to the desired height in stages. Avoid leaving clods of grass clippings on the lawn. Cut grass in shady spots higher than the rest of the lawn.

Be sure that the mower blades are sharp. Dull blades shred the ends of the blades exposing them to fungal infection.

## **IRRIGATE CORRECTLY**

April, May and early June are usually dry months in Flagler County. Check to ensure that all your sprinkler heads are functioning properly. Some may be clogged, damaged, leaking, misdirected or grown over by the turf. They should be repaired or replaced before your lawn begins to yellow. During dry periods, yellow or brown areas may indicate that the area is not receiving enough water. If we receive an inch of rain, the irrigation system should be automatically or manually shutdown until the ground dries

out, usually five to seven days. We often see sprinklers running while it is raining. This is a waste of our precious water.

When irrigating, put down three-fourths to one inch of water uniformly each time. Putting down water too often will promote shallow roots and make the turf less drought tolerant. It is better to irrigate less often with more water than more times with less water. Follow the guidelines of the St John's River Water Management District by irrigating with one inch of water each time, no more than twice per week.

Tuna or similar cans placed in the turf areas can be used to measure the amount and distribution. Set your timers or spray heads to obtain the desired flow.

Your lawn will tell you when to water. Leaf blades that begin to fold length-wise, foot or vehicle prints remain visible, and a change to a bluish-gray color are all signs that your lawn needs irrigation.

Irrigate early in the morning so excess moisture on the leaf surfaces will dry during the day. Irrigating late in the day will leave the turf wet and creates favorable conditions for turf diseases and fungal growth. Watering between 10:00 AM and 4:00 PM will waste irrigation water to evaporation and is not permitted under current municipal rulings.

## **FERTILIZER**

If you really *love* your lawn, fertilize every other month between March and September. Use a fertilizer with a 4-1-2 ratio of nitrogen - phosphorous - potassium such as a 16-4-8 with at least one percent iron. Use a slow release (water insoluble nitrogen) fertilizer to spread the fertilizer usage over a longer period. Quick release (water soluble nitrogen) fertilizers give the grass a quick boost and are leached away more quickly by rain or irrigation.

If you like a nice lawn, don't "love" your lawn, then two fertilizations - one in March and one in September are all you need. Iron can be used in May, June or July to help green up the grass without promoting excessive growth as regular fertilizers do. Pests such as chinch bugs and mole crickets favor excessive new growth caused by too much fertilizer.

Weed and Feed fertilizers containing Atrazine should not be used after April first. When ambient temperatures are above 85 °F Atrazine can severely damage St Augustine lawns. Fertilizer is best added separately with the weed treatment used only on areas having the weeds. 2, 4-D is often used in a weed and feed fertilizer. 2, 4-D should be avoided on St Augustine lawns since excessive amounts will kill a St Augustine grass.

## **TURF PESTS**

Start checking periodically for chinch bug damage, which usually appears first along sidewalks and driveways as yellowing and dead spots in the hot, dry weather. Treat these spots and the bordering areas early with a chinch bug control containing either cyfluthrin,

pyrethrins, permethrin, imidachloprid, deltamethrin, lambda cyhalothrin or carbaryl. Alternate your treatments to prevent the pests from spreading and building up immunity to the insecticide. If you have a lawn service, call them as soon as you see any damage. Be sure they are rotating the insecticide.

Do not fertilize the lawn when battling chinch bugs. Fertilizer encourages new growth, which is what the insects feed on. The populations will grow and you will have a very difficult time controlling them.

Small bare spots will grow back quickly; larger spots should be plugged or sodded to prevent weeds from becoming established.

Mole crickets are active in late May and early June since this is their mating season and is the best time for treatment with acephate, Orthene. Later, when the mole crickets are more mature and they should be baited since insecticides become less effective. If your St Augustine lawn is healthy, mole crickets will probably not be a problem.

Grubs are not as common a problem in St Augustine and other turf grasses. But, if present, they can be treated with a grub control insecticide. These usually need to be lightly watered in to penetrate into the soil. If you have armadillos frequenting your yard in the middle of the night, you may have grubs. They also feed on earthworms and ants, too.

## WEED MANGMENT

There are three types of weeds in our lawns, crabgrass, broadleaf weeds and sedges. Weeds usually move in as soon as the healthy grass thins which is one reason for keeping a healthy lawn. Hand pulling when weeds are first seen is often the most effective solution to weeds.

Crab grasses are generally annuals and should be hand pulled when first seen. Freezing temperatures usually kill them. If we haven't had freezing weather, they may live more than one year. Other treatments include Fertilome<sup>R</sup> Crabgrass Killer, Drexel<sup>R</sup> MSMA6, Prompt, a mixture of atrazine and bentazon and Sta-Green Crabgrass Preventer, a mixture of benefin and trifluralin. In all cases follow the label directions that come with the garden chemical.

Broadleaf weeds encompass a wide range of weeds. Usually three component mixtures are used against them. Ortho Weed-B-Gon<sup>R</sup> and Spectracide Weed Stop<sup>R</sup> are among herbicides that can be used against them. Atrazine is both a pre emergent and post emergent herbicide. To be most effective, these should be applied before the soil temperature rises above 68 degrees F which occurs in late January in Flagler County. Sixty eight degrees F is the temperature where weed seeds begin to germinate. The first treatment should be followed in six weeks with a second treatment and not again for another year. Do not use Atrazine when the daily temperatures are above 85 degrees F.

Sedges propagate by runners, seed and some by underground tubers. Imazaquin, Image<sup>R</sup> is effective against sedges and many broadleaf weeds such as dollar weed. It is a systemic herbicide which means that it is taken up through the roots and kills the weed from the inside out. It is one of the few herbicides that can be applied during our hot summer months without damaging a St Augustine lawn. Be careful when buying Image, there is a version that contains Atrazine in it. The literature recommends multiple treatments since sedges and dollar weed have runners that are hard to contact completely.

Remember a thick, healthy turf is your best weed control.

For more information on care and maintenance of your lawn please contact the University of Florida/IFAS Extension Service in your county or go to [www.solutionsforyourlife.com](http://www.solutionsforyourlife.com) and click on the lawn and garden link.

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