St. Augustinegrass for Florida Lawns

St. Augustinegrass is widely used in Florida and is becoming one of the most popular grasses in our area. It tends to be a coarse textured grass that produces a dark green dense turf and is adapted to most soil types. In general, it is salt tolerant and certain selections have good shade tolerance.

Home gardeners that are interested in St. Augustinegrass should choose a cultivar, or named selection, that will best fit their growing conditions and needs. St. Augustinegrass can be divided into two types based on natural growth habit: normal and semi-dwarf. Normal types have a tall growth habit and should be mowed at a height of three to four inches. The semi-dwarf types have a lower growth habit and should be mowed generally between 1½ to 2½ inches.

There are several cultivars of St. Augustinegrass. The different cultivars vary in their color, texture, tolerance to environmental stresses and susceptibility to pests.

One of the first names in St. Augustinegrass was Bitterblue and was selected in the 1930’s. What is typically sold as Bitterblue is fine textured and has a dark blue-green color. It has good cold tolerance and very good shade tolerance. However, because its tolerance to the herbicide atrazine is lower than other cultivars, weed control is more difficult.

Perhaps the most recognized type of St. Augustinegrass is Floratam. Floratam was released in 1973 by the University of Florida and Texas A&M. It is the most widely produced and used St. Augustinegrass in Florida. It grows vigorously in warm weather but tends to have a long dormancy period, greening up more slowly in the spring than other cultivars. Floratam is very coarse textured. It is also not as cold tolerant or as shade tolerant as other St. Augustinegrass cultivars.

Seville was the first patented turfgrass. It is a semi-dwarf type that should be mowed at 2 to 2½ inches. It is a finer textured grass with a dark green color and a low growth habit making it a bit more prone to thatch. Seville has very good shade tolerance and performs well in full sun. It can be cold sensitive.

Jade and Delmar are semi-dwarf cultivars of St. Augustinegrass that should be mowed at 1½ to 2½ inches. They have improved shade tolerance, a dark green color and better cold tolerance than Seville. Jade has a finer leaf blade and better shade tolerance than Delmar. Delmar has enhanced cold tolerance. Both
have slow runner growth making recovery from damage or establishment from plugs slower.

Raleigh was released in 1980. It is a cold-hardy cultivar that is coarse textured and has a medium green color. During peak summer heat, Raleigh has been noted to yellow and not grow as aggressively as during cooler temperatures. Supplemental iron applications can be applied to retain its green color during these periods.

One of the newer selections of St. Augustinegrass is Palmetto. It is of intermediate height, shorter than most other cultivars but longer than the dwarf St. Augustinegrass cultivars. It is noted for its rapid spread and dark green color.

**Tip of the Week:** You may be noticing a blistering or puckering appearance on your oak leaves. This is caused by a fungus and is commonly called oak leaf blister. The infected leaves may shed early but other than the ugly appearance, the fungus causes no problems for the tree.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names in this article is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.