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Common Bermudagrass [*Cynodon dactylon* (L.) Pers.] Contamination Management in Florida Turfgrasses[1]

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Target Audience

This publication serves as a resource for turfgrass professionals, Extension specialists, and clientele in managing common bermudagrass infestations in Florida turfgrasses.

Introduction

Bermudagrasses (*Cynodon* spp. Rich) are warm-season perennial grasses commonly used in the southern United States. While some types are grown for forage, in Florida, bermudagrasses are most often associated with turfgrass systems, particularly on golf courses and athletic fields (Figures 1, 2, and 3). In turfgrass, bermudagrasses, especially improved cultivars, are valued for aggressive growth, rapid establishment, and ability to tolerate a wide range of environmental conditions, including drought, heat, heavy traffic, and a variety of herbicides. One of the few drawbacks of this turfgrass species is its limited performance under shaded conditions.

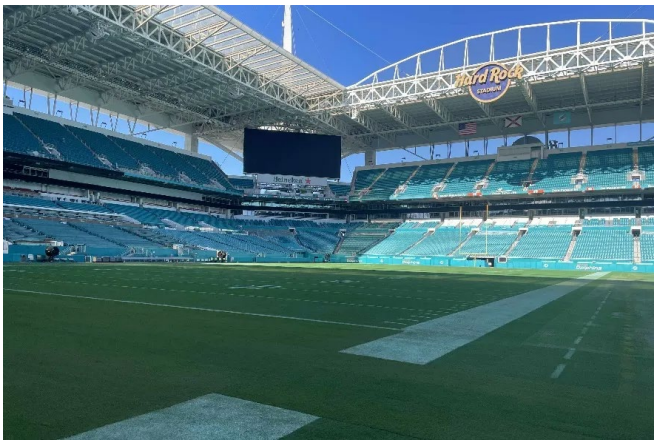

Figure 1. Hybrid bermudagrass athletic field.
Credit: Marco Schiavon, UF/IFAS Department of Agronomy.

Figure 2. Hybrid bermudagrass golf course fairway.
Credit: Todd Lowe, Todd Lowe Consulting.

Figure 3. Hybrid bermudagrass golf course putting green.
Credit: Todd Lowe, Todd Lowe Consulting.

Despite the aforementioned uses as turfgrass, common bermudagrass [*Cynodon dactylon* (L.) Pers.] (Figure 4), hereafter referred to as bermudagrass, becomes one of the most problematic weeds when it contaminates other turfgrass species (Figures 5 and 6). The same traits that make it desirable also make it difficult to control. It frequently establishes in areas where the desired turf is under stress, rapidly outcompeting it and persisting by stolons, rhizomes, and seed propagation. It survives stress through an extensive and resource-efficient root and shoot

network, enters dormancy when needed, and uses stolons to quickly colonize new areas and outcompete other vegetation. In cooler months in north-central and, especially, north Florida, it will turn brown and enter dormancy. In south Florida, during most years, bermudagrass remains green year-round.

Figure 4. Typical common bermudagrass inflorescence.
Credit: Pawel Petelewicz, UF/IFAS Department of Agronomy.

Figure 5. Close-up of St. Augustinegrass canopy infested with bermudagrass.
Credit: Pawel Petelewicz, UF/IFAS Department of Agronomy.

Figure 6. Bermudagrass infestation in seashore paspalum turf.
Credit: Todd Lowe, Todd Lowe Consulting.

Unimproved bermudagrasses lack the aesthetic qualities of improved cultivars and tend to form a thin and uneven canopy. Because their responses to environmental conditions often differ from those of the intended turf, their presence typically results in a patchy and unsightly appearance. Ultimately, such contamination reduces turf quality and uniformity, diminishes property, enterprise, or production value or output, and may compromise the primary function of the turfgrass system. Additionally, its tolerance to many herbicides makes selective removal extremely difficult once it is established.

Management in Florida Turfgrasses

Proper identification is the first and most important step in effective weed control. Since bermudagrasses are also widely used as managed turfgrass, their identification is thoroughly covered in the Ask IFAS publication ENH1382, "Florida Turfgrass Identification."

Management and control of bermudagrass follow general principles and recommendations for weed control in Florida turfgrass, which are outlined in the Ask IFAS publication ENH884, "Weed Management Guide for Florida Lawns." Reviewing that publication is recommended for a more thorough understanding of the broader context. The strategies and solutions presented below offer more specific, supplementary guidance for managing bermudagrass contaminations in other turfgrasses.

Preventative Control

Since bermudagrass can reproduce by seed, it is important to implement strategies that minimize seed dispersal into turf areas. Mowing within two weeks of seedhead emergence does not allow seed to mature and reduces the risk of seed dispersal (Figure 4). Attaching a basket to collect clippings may also be beneficial.

Additionally, to help limit the spread of bermudagrass from other infested areas, install edging materials that

extend at least six inches deep into the soil to separate beds from turf.

Additional prevention methods, such as regular equipment cleaning, limiting foot and machinery traffic, preparing weed-free ground before establishing new turf, using weed-free plant material, etc., are outlined in the Ask IFAS publication ENH884, "Weed Management Guide for Florida Lawns."

Cultural Control

Modifications in cultural practices can improve bermudagrass control. The plant's main weakness, poor tolerance to low light, can be exploited by increasing canopy density. This can be achieved by raising the mowing height of the desired turfgrass to the upper end of its recommended range. Doing so helps shade out bermudagrass, weakening it and making it more vulnerable to suboptimal conditions, while also improving the desired turf's tolerance to herbicides. In contrast, turf maintained at lower mowing heights may reduce herbicide effectiveness, making bermudagrass control nearly impossible.

Water deeply and infrequently, because shallow, frequent irrigation favors bermudagrass growth and reduces resource use efficiency in the desired turf. Moreover, in low-input turfgrasses such as centipedegrass, reducing or eliminating fertility can suppress bermudagrass competition, gradually promoting dominance of the desired turf. Regular mowing and minimal intervention further support centipedegrass establishment.

Physical/Mechanical Control

Due to its aggressive stoloniferous and rhizomatous growth, which causes bermudagrass to blend extensively with desirable turf, physical or mechanical control methods are not practical in established swards, except when complete vegetation removal and site renovation are planned. In such cases, fraise or aggressive vertical mowing a few weeks after the initial application of a non-selective herbicide, typically glyphosate, improves eradication.

Chemical Control

In most cases, chemical tools are necessary to achieve successful bermudagrass control. To ensure proper application and desired outcomes, general principles and guidelines should be followed as outlined in the following Ask IFAS publications: ENH884, "Weed Management Guide for Florida Lawns"; SS-AGR-394, "Turfgrass Herbicides: Mode of Action and Resistance Management"; and ENH1311, "Florida Homeowner Herbicide Guide: Considerations, Applications, and Selection."

Preemergence Herbicides

Preemergence herbicides are not a feasible strategy for preventing bermudagrass establishment in warm-season Florida turfgrasses because no herbicide options are currently labeled for that purpose. At best, certain products such as dinitroanilines and indaziflam may cause limited injury to existing bermudagrass stolons at the edges of a lawn, but their efficacy in preventing encroachment is limited and should not be considered a dependable preventative control method.

Postemergence Herbicides

Managing established bermudagrass infestations in lawns often relies on herbicide applications to reduce its presence and minimize competition with desirable turfgrasses. However, the range of selective herbicides available for controlling this species in warm-season turf is limited.

As with most perennial species, applications should target actively growing bermudagrass, ideally from early spring during green-up through early summer, or again in the fall when herbicide translocation within stolons and rhizomes is improved and the plant transitions from vegetative growth to carbohydrate storage. Timing depends on the specific chemistry used, as directed by the product label. Adequate suppression typically requires repeated treatments, which at times may carry a risk of injury to the preferred turf. Additionally, because tolerance to herbicides can vary among cultivars within the same turfgrass species, it is important to choose herbicides with these differences in mind.

Currently, there are no postemergence herbicide options for bermudagrass available to homeowners through big-box retailers. Table 1 outlines professional-grade postemergence herbicide options for bermudagrass control or suppression in the most common Florida turfgrasses. In cases where selective removal is possible, bermudagrass control most often relies on graminicides (i.e., herbicides targeting grassy weeds). These include sethoxydim, which is labeled for use in centipedegrass, although the low allowable rates limit its effectiveness, and fenoxaprop and fluazifop, which can selectively control or suppress bermudagrass in zoysiagrass. Until recently, ethofumesate was the only labeled option to suppress bermudagrass in St. Augustinegrass. Some recommendations included tank-mixing it with atrazine (although the label does not mention this use) and applying at green-up, as later applications showed limited effectiveness. Be aware that St. Augustinegrass often responds to such treatments with stunted growth and discoloration. Newer, significantly more effective, and safer solutions have been developed, as discussed below. Additionally, certain ethofumesate products are also labeled for bermudagrass suppression in seashore paspalum.

A new formulation of trifloxysulfuron + metcamifen safener (inert ingredient, not listed on label), called Recognition, is now available in Florida and is safe on St. Augustinegrass (unlike Monument 75WG, which is an original trifloxysulfuron formulation). Recognition alone has no efficacy against bermudagrass (trifloxysulfuron is safe on this species), but it also reduces the risk of injury from fluazifop when tank-mixed, making the Recognition + fluazifop combination the first effective option for selectively removing bermudagrass from St. Augustinegrass.

However, as Recognition is a fairly new solution, not all cultivars and environmental contexts have been tested yet. While the combination of Recognition + fluazifop is generally effective for selective bermudagrass removal and safe on most St. Augustinegrass cultivars, reduced safety has been observed on Captiva, ProVista, and Seville. Injury risk is further elevated when applications are made in late summer or fall. To avoid unexpected damage, conduct small-scale tests in areas where injury can be tolerated before making broadcast applications. These tests should account not only for cultivar sensitivity but also for environmental factors and seasonal timing. To further minimize injury risk, prioritize spring applications when turf is actively growing and avoid treatments during late summer or fall, when heat stress and reduced metabolic activity can increase the risk of damage, particularly in sensitive cultivars.

The metcamifen safener in Recognition is also effective in zoysiagrass. As mentioned, fluazifop is already labeled for use in zoysiagrass; however, its efficacy against bermudagrass is limited by lower allowable rates when used alone. When tank-mixed with Recognition, higher (maximum) rates of fluazifop can be used safely, significantly enhancing selective bermudagrass control.

In turfgrass species where no selective herbicide options exist, non-selective products such as glyphosate (used alone or premixed with diquat) or glufosinate can be applied as spot treatments targeting bermudagrass patches and surrounding areas to eliminate any intermingled runners. To enhance efficacy, tank mixes may include additives such as ammonium sulfate, aforementioned graminicides, or other products as described below. In cases of severe infestations, glyphosate (or the mentioned tank mixes) may be applied at high rates in sequential broadcast treatments to eliminate existing vegetation and allow for complete stand renovation. Cultural practices that disrupt plant tissue, such as vertical mowing or aerification, should be delayed for at least seven days after treatment.

Other herbicides that can be incorporated into spot/non-selective treatment are triclopyr and topramezone. Triclopyr is commonly used in cool-season turfgrasses for bermudagrass control and other broadleaf weed management purposes. Prior to the development of Recognition, triclopyr was sometimes tank-mixed with fluazifop to reduce injury in zoysiagrass. However, triclopyr is highly damaging to most warm-season turf species, making broadcast applications unsuitable. In warm-season turf, it can potentially be used as a spot treatment, especially as an additive in non-selective mixes targeting bermudagrass in localized areas. Topramezone is labeled for use at low rates in managed bermudagrass turf, with temporary bleaching following application. At higher rates, it can be used to control common bermudagrass. It is also labeled for use in centipedegrass; however, for bermudagrass control, the label recommends tank-mixing with triclopyr. Because triclopyr is not safe for broadcast use in warm-season turf, this combination is limited to spot applications only.

Additional Resources

For a comprehensive summary of professional-grade herbicides for use in turfgrass and information on proper resistance management practices, consult Ask IFAS publication SS-AGR-394, "Turfgrass Herbicides: Mode of Action and Resistance Management."

For additional information and guidance on proper management practices and control strategies for weeds in turfgrass and landscape, consult the following Ask IFAS publications: ENH884, "Weed Management Guide for Florida Lawns"; ENH1262, "Improving Weed Control in Landscape Planting Beds"; ENH1311, "Florida Homeowner Herbicide Guide: Considerations, Applications, and Selection"; and/or ENH95, "Postemergent Herbicides for Use in Ornamentals."

To protect your lawn from other pests, consult the following Ask IFAS publications: SSPLP14, "Turfgrass Disease Management"; PP-233, "Homeowner's Guide to Fungicides for Lawn and Landscape Disease Management"; and ENY-006, "Nematode Management in Residential Lawns."

To keep your lawn healthy, always follow UF/IFAS recommendations. For comprehensive guidelines on proper management practices for particular turfgrass species, consult the following Ask IFAS publications: ENH6, "Bahiagrass for Florida Lawns"; ENH19, "Bermudagrass for Florida Lawns"; ENH8, "Centipedegrass for Florida Lawns"; ENH5, "St. Augustinegrass for Florida Lawns"; or ENH11, "Zoysiagrass for Florida Lawns."

For additional resources on proper turfgrass management practices, consult the following Ask IFAS publications: ENH979, "Homeowner Best Management Practices for the Home Lawn"; ENH10, "Mowing Your Florida Lawn"; ENH9, "Watering Your Florida Lawn"; ENH860, "Fertilization and Irrigation Needs for Florida Lawns and Landscapes"; ENH1089, "Urban Turf Fertilizer Rule for Home Lawn Fertilization"; ENH1287, "Iron for Florida Turfgrasses"; or ENH 02, "Preparing to Plant a Florida Lawn."

Notes

Mention of a commercial or herbicide brand name or chemical does not constitute a recommendation or warranty of the product by the authors or UF/IFAS, nor does it imply approval of the product to the exclusion of other products that may also be suitable. Products should be used according to label instructions and safety equipment required on the label and by federal or state law should be employed. Pesticide registrations may change, so it is the responsibility of the user to ascertain if a pesticide is registered by the appropriate state and federal agencies for its intended use.

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Table 1. Professional-grade postemergence herbicide options for the control or suppression of common bermudagrass (*Cynodon dactylon*) in most prevalent Florida turfgrasses.

HRAC WSSA Group[a]	Active Ingredient(s) (simplified)	Turfgrass Species								Commercial Product Example(s)
		BERb	STA	BAHI	CARP	CENT	PASP	ZOYS	RYE	
POSTEMERGENCE										
Standalones										
8	Ethofumesate	R[c]	T	NI	NI	NI	T	D	T	Etho 4 SC, Prograss EC, Prograss SC
		R	T	NI	NI	NI	NI	D	T	Ethofumesate 4SC, PoaConstrictor
1	Fenoxaprop	D	NI	D	NI	NI	NI	T	T	Acclaim Extra
1	Fluazifop	NI	NI	NI	NI	NI	NI	T	NI	Fusilade II, Ornamec 170, Ornamec Over-The-Top
1	Sethoxydim	D	NI	D	NI	T	NI	NI	D	Segment, Segment II
4	Triclopyr	D	D	D	NI	D	NI	D	T	Triclopyr 4, Trycera, Turflon Ester, Turflon Ester Ultra
27	Topramezone	R	D	D	D	T	R	D	T	Pylex
Section 2(ee) Recommendations										
2 + N/A[d] + 1	Trifloxysulfuron + metcamifen + fluazifop	D[c]	T	D	NI	NI	NI	T	D	Recognition + Fusilade II T&O *Tank-mix*

[a] HRAC=Herbicide Resistance Action Committee; WSSA=Weed Science Society of America; Group=Herbicide mode of action (MOA) group as classified by HRAC and WSSA. (For more information about MOAs, consult Ask IFAS publication SS-AGR-394, "Turfgrass Herbicides: Mode of Action and Resistance Management.")

[b] BER=Bermudagrass; STA=St. Augustinegrass; BAHI=Bahiagrass; CARP=Carpetgrass; CENT=Centipedegrass; PASP=Seashore paspalum; ZOYS=Zoysiagrass; RYE=Perennial ryegrass.

[c] T=Tolerant at labeled rates on well-established (mature, dense turf having a well-anchored root system and healthy, vigorous top growth), healthy turf when applied in optimal conditions; R=Restrictions apply, and/or some injury may occur, and/or may cause some minor damage to mature, healthy turf, and/or crop safety may differ between certain products; D=Potentially damaging — do not use; NI=No information provided on the label, or not registered for use on this species — use not recommended.

[d] N/A=Active ingredient not subject to classification by Herbicide Resistance Action Committee; metcamifen=safener (i.e., not herbicide).

Mention of a commercial or herbicide brand name or chemical does not constitute a recommendation or warranty of the product by the authors or UF/IFAS, nor does it imply approval of the product to the exclusion of other products that may also be suitable.

Professional-grade herbicides should be handled by trained and licensed/certified personnel and applied using calibrated equipment. Always refer to the label for specific uses, application rates, turfgrass tolerance, and handler and environment safety. Always check for specific precautions and restrictions.

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Use pesticides safely. Read and follow directions on the manufacturer's label.

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