

## **Gardening Reminders**

By the Royal Oaks Landscape Committee

### **Zorro Comes to Royal Oaks!**

No, not the swashbuckling hero, but one of three zoysia grasses recently approved in the Royal Oaks Design Guidelines. The other two zoysia grasses are zeon and emerald (and who doesn't love a nice emerald?). The Bermuda Tiff 419 that has been used in the neighborhood since its beginning is not performing as well now that many landscapes are more mature and shaded. Zoysia blends in well with the fine bladed Tiff 419. Generally, zoysia can be grown in all soil types and grows well in moderately shaded locations. Before installation, the soil should be tilled to loosen the top layer. A thin layer of enriched topsoil or quality compost should be added as this will help promote quicker root growth. Zoysia turns brown after the first hard frost, but it is among the first warm-season grasses to green up in the spring. It is also drought tolerant. The grass will turn straw colored during severe drought conditions, but will respond to irrigation or rainfall.

Zeon is one of most shade tolerant and fastest growing zoysias on the market. Zorro has a very fine leaf texture and is preferred by those wanting a beautiful manicured look. It was developed by Texas A&M University. Emerald is an older, but very dependable variety of zoysia. It is very durable and has a slightly stiffer blade than other varieties.

Zoysia grasses are relatively free of serious pest problems. The white grub is the major insect attacking zoysia turf.

Close, frequent mowing produces the finest zoysia grass turf. On lawns growing in full sun, zoysia may be mowed at a height of 1" to 1-1/2" every five to seven days. Less frequent mowing at these recommended heights results in scalping and generally poor quality turf. In shaded sites, zoysia should be mowed slightly higher than recommended for lawns in full sun. Mowing frequency should not change for shaded sites even though the mowing height is slightly increased.

Zoysia lawns tend to build up a thatch layer, a layer of undecomposed organic residues just above the soil surface. Proper mowing and avoiding excessive applications of nitrogen fertilizer will help prevent the thatch accumulation.

#### **DON'T:**

- Overseed. Overseeding often kills zoysia.
- Overfertilize with nitrogen. It promotes disease.
- Overwater. It promotes fungal disease.

#### **DO:**

- Mow with a reel mower, if possible, or a very sharp rotary mower.

- Mow as close to 1" in height as possible.
- Mow regularly or zoysia will scalp.
- Verticut\* every 2 to 3 years to remove thatch.
- Use low nitrogen fertilizers with micro-nutrients, especially iron.
- Treat with pelletized gypsum 1-2 times per year.
- Water deeply, 1-2 times per week.

Zoysia grass is often used on golf courses. George Manuel, the Royal Oaks Country Club Golf Course Superintendent, gave us his sources for zoysia. They are King Ranch Turfgrass and All Season Turf Grass. The contact at King Ranch is Kevin Bryant, 979-244-6449 (Bay City). You may contact Scott Sipes with All Seasons at 281-375-7505 (Brookshire).

*Happy gardening!*

\*Verticutting, or vertical mowing, removes thatch buildup in the lawn so turf can breathe easy, better absorb nutrients, and soak in much-needed moisture. If you use a mulching mower and leave grass clippings on the lawn, that does NOT lead to thatch formation. Thatch is a layer of dead stems and roots that form between the grass and soil, and they don't fully decompose. It isn't all bad. Small amounts can actually reduce compaction in high-traffic commercial areas. But when thatch exceeds a half-inch, all that biomass starts eating up the good stuff that belongs to your turf: air, water and food. Plus, insects and disease fester in thatch. You'll know your lawn has thatch buildup if it feels spongy when you walk across it. The prime time to verticut is before the growing season. Verticutting can be done with a special rake, but it is best done with a verticutting machine.

*Sources: Richard L. Duble, Turfgrass Specialist, Texas A&M University; Scott Sipes, All Seasons; Kevin Bryant, King Ranch Turfgrass.*