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Fighting Bermudagrass Takes Persistence

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Bermudagrass' ability to reproduce makes it tough to eradicate

SUMMARY

Bermudagrass is tough to eradicate, and fighting it may be a continuous process.

Q. I have seedy looking patches of "foreign" grass in my lawn. I have identified it as bermudagrass. It turns brownish in the winter and is spreading everywhere — into shrubs and flower beds. How can I get rid of it?

A. There are various ways to manage bermudagrass, but it is not easy. You may need a combination of methods, and you will definitely need persistence. The control process can take a long time and may even be continuous. I used to own a home with bermudagrass lawns, so I know the difficulties of dealing with it.

Bermudagrass (*Cynodon dactylon*) is a wiry perennial with two types of shoots: those above ground (stolons) and those below ground (rhizomes). Both are capable of rooting in soil, so they can create new plants as they grow out from the original plant or when they are cut and left on moist soil. Seeds of common bermudagrass can remain viable for at least two years. The plant's ability to propagate so readily makes it difficult to keep in bounds. Simply digging it out or

mulching with something like wood chips will not bring lasting control.

Organic landscape (geotextile) fabric used underneath a regular mulch can be effective, as long as there are no holes or gaps. Black plastic polyethylene applied over bermudagrass patches (or a whole lawn) can work by excluding light. The use of clear polyethylene (called solarization) may eliminate the grass and its seeds by "cooking" the plant with sunlight. In both cases, the polyethylene must be applied during the hottest time of the year and left undisturbed for six to eight weeks. It must be secured to stay put, with no holes. Polyethylene will not be effective in winter. Start in summer, when the grass is well-watered and vigorous.

Chemical controls are never a first choice, but herbicides may be useful in this case. Grass selective herbicides will kill bermudagrass without harm to most broadleaf plants. They can be used in your shrub and flower beds. Examples are sethoxydim (Grass Getter), and fluazifop (Oramec and Grass-B-Gon).



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Nonselective herbicides such as glyphosate (Roundup and other brand names) will kill any plant, including bermudagrass, but may have other unwanted effects.

When using herbicides, be sure to read and carefully follow all label directions.

Seeds of bermudagrass will not be controlled by any of the above methods except solarization, so you may need to treat again.

Another option: Just live with it! That’s what I decided to do with my former bermudagrass lawns.

For more detail and to identify bermudagrass, go to these University of California web pages:

<http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7453.html> (Bermudagrass)

<http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn74145.html> (solarization).



Photo: Jack Kelly Clark, UC IPM; Bermudagrass is an invasive turf species that many gardeners and homeowners try to combat