**Primetime**

**By Calvin R. Finch, PhD, SAWS Director, and Horticulturist**

Wednesday, April 11, 2012

**Expect Your Lawn to Comeback in April**

If your lawn is like mine it may be hard to see if the St. Augustine grass, Bermuda grass or Zoysia grass has begun its green-up for the Spring because the weeds are so dominant. It won’t be long, however, and the weeds will decline. They don’t survive long in 80 degree temperatures.

The first thing you notice is that the rescue grass, annual rye, and other weeds will lose their bright green color. In addition to mildew, cool weather weeds just fade as their growing period comes to an end.

In most cases the permanent grass will respond to the warm weather and decline of the weeds to fill the new space with its own growth. Keep the lawn mowed and the transition will be pretty seamless. Don’t be fooled by the decline of the winter weeds to think that you need to step up watering. The green weeds are going to fade whether you drench them in irrigation or not and there is plenty of moisture in the soil for the lawn grass to begin growing.

Some of you who have a lawn in full sun and managed to keep it watered enough last summer may not have a lawn dominated by weeds. The sod is dormant but thick. The grass should be beginning its growth in that situation as well.

Lawn grasses, especially Bermuda and St. Augustine grass fill in very quickly once growth starts. Give the lawn some time to do its thing. About May 1 the lawn should be fertilized and at that time you can also assess the “state of the lawn.” If there are still large dead areas, consider filling in with pieces of sod to speed up the repair. Most sod suppliers allow you to buy small quantities of sod as needed.

Match the variety in your lawn if that is possible, but if you have St. Augustine grass and want to improve the lawn’s drought tolerance, look for Floratam St. Augustine grass. You may pay a premium for the variety but it is worth it because of its drought tolerance and disease resistance. Floratam was the St. Augustine grass that stayed greenest the longest and greened-up the fastest in tests conducted by Texas A&M, SAWS, and Texas Turfgrass Producers in San Antonio. Floratam even performed better than the zoysia grasses in the test.

If your lawn is in such bad shape that you want to start all over make sure that you take action that solves the problems that resulted in a dead lawn. Here are the usual issues:

* Is there at least six inches of soil? Without a six inch deep reservoir for roots and water it was hard for grass to survive in our record low rainfall and extremely high temperatures.
* Is there too much shade? A certain amount of shade helps a St. Augustine lawn survive in our hot summer weather, but if there is too much shade the lawn is thin and suffers in competition with the tree roots for rain.
* Did you take advantage of your watering times once per week? St. Augustine grass in full sun is stressed in the best of our summers, last year it needed the once per week watering allowed under “SAWS Drought Management Rules” in Stage I and Stage II.
* Was your sprinkler system operating efficiently? If water was not applied uniformly you would have dry areas.
* Other issues can involve slopes and compacted soils. Water runs off slopes rather than penetrate the soil. The same thing can happen on compacted soils. Aeration helps reduce compaction and terracing helps deal with slopes.

If you do not want to or can’t address the limitations to lawn survival listed above, consider converting all or part of your lawn to a low water use landscape (xeriscape).

The groundcovers, perennials, shrubs, and hardscape you use to create a xeriscape landscape can be lush, have 12 months of color, require little water, be easy to maintain, and be easy to install.

For more information attend one of the Gardening Volunteers of South Texas/SAWS “Low Water Design Program” and/or visit [www.plantanswers.com](http://www.plantanswers.com) to review my articles on the topic.