

# More bermuda in the outfield

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**Q:** *On my baseball outfield, I have lots of common Bermuda, but would like more. I want to sow some seed this spring, but I don't want to plow it up and upset what I already have and we also want to continue playing on it. Can I aerate it real good, do some hand raking and sow the seed without plowing? Will I have any success this way? If we do decide to start from scratch this summer, what is the best way to seed it so it grows in fast? Thanks for your answer.*

Florida

**A:** Thanks for the e-mail. I regularly get questions relating to planting bermudagrass the way you have suggested. While this is not the ideal way to establish bermudagrass, it can be used to fill large bare areas. But I am not sure that it would be overly beneficial to do this just to strengthen a stand. In the southeast (especially Florida) with typical the late spring and summer conditions, you can grow bermudagrass pretty quickly. In fact, some people tell me that in the summer, by the time they finish mowing their fields they need to start over it has grown so much. Of course our summer heat and humidity may contribute to this phenomenon.

For weak turf areas and bare areas less than one foot in diameter, I generally recommend the areas be grown in via well-

timed additions of extra fertilizer and irrigation. The four things bermudagrass likes most are light, heat, nitrogen fertilizer, and water. Spot applications with a quarter to half pound of soluble nitrogen per thousand square feet every five to seven day for 2-3 weeks will really fill in the bermudagrass turf. As it begins to fill cut back on the fertilization rate.

Seeding into an existing bermudagrass stand and then trying to grow the grass from seed is a little counterpro-

ductive to effectively managing the existing bermudagrass. The newly sown seed needs to be kept moist for germination and early seedling growth. This requires frequent light irrigation to prevent drying. The more mature grass should be watered more deeply and infrequently. So you are really managing two different stages of growth. Water management for the germinating seeds and young seedlings is much more critical than the mature turf. If you err on the wet side and continue using the field, added soil moisture may cause some problems with field playability. I am not saying it cannot be done, but this will require a lot of your attention.

If you go this route, my suggestion would be to cut the turf as short as you can get away with at this time of year (and your conditions), put the seed out first and then not aerate too deeply. This may get more seed in contact with ground, which can improve germination. Dragging with a mat or rolling with a light weight roller afterwards also helps firm the seedbed, remove imperfections and aid germination. Keep the site reasonable moist. I think these practices will give you some assurance of success. And remember that bermudagrass likes nitrogen fertilizer so when it does come up, apply some fertilizer on a regular basis to keep it spreading.

Now if you decide to go all out and start with a clean seedbed, I also have some suggestions. After preparing the seedbed, broadcast your seed with your spreader using the seed suppliers' recommended rate. I would then suggest that you carefully rake the seed into the soil using a leaf rake or three-wheeled sand rake. It would be helpful if you can lightly topdress with soil similar to your soil profile but most managers do not do this extra step. Lightly roll to improve seed-to-soil contact and remove surface imperfections.

I would highly recommend you using some kind of cover over the seed. Last year I had some experience with an erosion control mat/fabric called Futerra (product name mentioned as an example, not as an endorsement) and was very impressed with the difference between covered or not covered germination and early growth of bermudagrass from seed. There are a number of these mats on the market so I would suggest you investigate their feasibility. After last year, I am convinced they are a worthwhile investment for establishing from seed. They hold in more moisture that seems to increase germination time and the cover helps keeps the seeds in place when you get those summer thunderstorms. Good luck with your field. ■



Bermudagrass growth 30 days after seeding.