

# TifGrand bermudagrass bred for shade available next year



THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA has licensed a new variety of bermudagrass to grow well in both full sun and in shade. Called “TifGrand,” it is licensed by the University of Georgia Research Foundation to New Concept Turf and is expected to be available in 2010.

New Concept Turf, a Georgia-based company specializing in marketing new turfgrasses, has contracted Ft. Valley, GA-based The Turfgrass Group to exclusively handle licensing of TifGrand for sod production. TifGrand was licensed to a selected number of growers this summer.

TifGrand was developed by Wayne Hanna, professor of plant breeding and genetics in the Department of Crop and Soil Sciences at UGA’s College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences.

“Although TifGrand produces a beautiful turf in full sun, its major contribution will be the production of nice turf in areas with reduced light, up to 60 percent less light than is normally required for healthy bermudagrass growth,” Dr. Hanna said in a news release.

TifGrand is the first sterile triploid hybrid with improved shade tolerance. Research testing over the past 10 years demonstrates its excellent growth at 60 percent to 70 percent shade levels. It can tolerate up to 90 percent shade levels, but it will have lower density. Dr. Hanna believes it will be the most shade-tolerant turf commercially available, according to an article in *Carolinas Green* magazine by Chris Hartwiger of USGA Southeast Region, Green Section. Here is more from that article, used here with permission by Sam Williams:

“Due to its semi-dwarf nature, TifGrand is not overly aggressive and it will tend to stay where planted and not encroach into nearby areas. [It] has both stolons and rhizomes and another unique feature is the lack of dew on the leaves in the morning, like *paspalum*. It has excellent mole cricket non-preference resistance and lower nitrogen fertility requirements compared to Tifway and TifSport.

“Like most bermudagrasses, seed heads are produced during June in full sun locations, but this is the only drawback observed. Few to no seed heads are present in shady locations. TifGrand will be popular for use at shaded rough areas, shaded tees, and shaded lawns. Fairway plantings are only advised for shaded sites initially, but this may change over time. Putting green tests at 5/32-inch are underway and it seems to produce a high quality surface. [It] should do well at shaded putting green sites with up to 60 percent to 70 percent shade. No other putting green bermudagrass ever has shown shade tolerance and this development will help many courses where shade around putting greens is a major issue.

“Sod will be recommended rather than sprigs at shaded sites to ensure the [grass] establishes well. Tests using sprigs at shaded sites didn’t work as well as the sod for establishment, especially where there is tree root competition.” ■

## With new turfgrass, UGA sees green

Here’s an excerpt from a June 5 article by Lee Shearer of the Athens Banner-Herald on the financial implications of TifGrand:

“A new Bermuda variety developed by University of Georgia turfgrass researcher Wayne Hanna could let homeowners have their shade trees and carpet of lawn, too, when it becomes available to the public in 2010.

The grass grows in shade as well as sun and has sod-growers lining up for the right to grow the new grass, said Bill Carraway, vice president of marketing for a Fort Valley company called The Turfgrass Group.

“It is so, so big,” said Carraway, who is crisscrossing the country from California to South Carolina this summer, signing up sod-producers to begin growing the new grass, called TifGrand.

“This is a breakthrough,” Carraway said. Sod producers are “stacked up like cordwood wanting to get license to produce.”

Grasses developed in Tifton by UGA and U.S. Department of

Agriculture researchers working under Hanna and his predecessor, Glenn Burton, have grown on golf courses and athletic fields around the world for decades.

“Probably the center of the universe for warm-season turf grasses is in Tifton,” said Mike Garland, director of the Georgia Seed Development Commission.

Augusta National Golf Club and hundreds of other courses use UGA Tif varieties; most Southeastern Conference football teams (including Florida) play on turf grasses developed in Tifton, said Hanna, who began working in Tifton in 1971.

But the new TifGrand could penetrate a different market, and potentially add millions of dollars to the University of Georgia Research Foundation’s bottom line. The foundation owns patents for inventions and discoveries by UGA scientists, and uses some of the income from licensing and royalties to promote research at UGA. Researchers also get a cut.

“This is opening a door for us,” said Shelley Fincher of the UGA Research Foundation’s Technology Commercialization Office.

“We’re pretty excited about it. Everybody wants to have a shade tree in their back yard,” Hanna said.

The grass’s expected popularity could add millions of dollars to the research foundation’s bottom line.

In the five fiscal years from 2004 through 2008, producers paid \$3.2 million in fees for the right to grow UGA-developed turfgrasses, Fincher said, about 4 percent of the research foundation’s income from royalties and licensing fees.

Hanna and his research team took years to develop the new TifGrand Bermuda grass, using traditional plant breeding techniques. The researchers began by planting 27,500 hybrid varieties in 1992, he said. In 1993, the researchers picked the best 448 candidates from those and have been weeding out the pretenders ever since, he said.

“Every few years, we’d cut the number in half,” he said. ■