



*Keeping Your Yard Beautiful!*

# FLORIDA SOD

*SELECTION & MAINTENANCE  
GUIDE*

 **Roedell's** LANDSCAPING  
& SUPPLIES



# INTRODUCTION

Planning to purchase sod and installation or self-install, is a big decision as a homeowner. It can be a large, long-term investment and the decision should be met with considerable research and preparation. There are many varieties of sod to choose from not all will fit your needs. It is important to have some basic knowledge before starting to get quotes from your Orlando Landscaper.

As well, a property assessment will give you a better idea of how feasible a self-install is compared to hiring a professional and can save you hundreds if not thousands of dollars in repairs and maintenance down the road.

When considering sod for your lawn, you need to determine several choices that will lead you to the proper type of sod to serve your needs.

## Things to Consider are:

- ➔ What type of lawn you are looking for aesthetically
- ➔ Environmental and Soil Conditions and/or Limitations
- ➔ Tolerances such as drought, shade, wear, pest and salt tolerance
- ➔ Pesticides, Fertilizers & Weed Killers
- ➔ How Much maintenance can you reasonably supply

Once you have taken the time to consider all of these points, you will feel more confident when you start the process of gathering quotes and narrowing your decision down. You can make sure your quotes are comparing the same things and not be unprepared for a line item that may or may not be required for your specific circumstances.

If you decide to use a professional Orlando Landscaper to install your sod, you may also want to consider a Landscape Plan at the same time. Even if you don't initiate the plan right away, you can save on sod if you know where planters and flowerbeds will be installed in the future. As well, some Orlando Landscapers will give a discount on plants purchased and installed at the same time as sod is installed. This is because of time savings. They are already at your property. To transport and plant landscaping while sod is being installed saves an entire new mobilization at a later date.

We hope the information contained herein will be beneficial in assisting you to make the right decision for your best desired outcome for your lawn.



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## Types Of Sod

Types of Sod vary depending on region. We include here those that are best suited to the Central Florida area. Please note that lawn heights are the recommend standard heights to maintain lawn for optimal performance.

**St. Augustine** – The most popular type of sod used in this region because of its adaptation to a hot and humid environment, St. Augustine provides growth of dense blue-green, medium to coarse blades in a variety of soils. When it thrives, St. Augustine can crowd out weeds on its own. It does best in fertile, well-draining soil and will establish quickly under proper conditions. Its color will last into fall unlike other grasses. St. Augustine will create a beautiful carpet like lawn when properly maintained.

St. Augustine does require a bit more care than other turf grasses in that it does require more watering during dry season, mowing and maintenance. It is prone to some disadvantages that include poor wear tolerance, poor salt tolerance for those near the ocean and some other elemental concerns such as:

**Thatch** – a loose layer of material between the soil and green vegetation that is comprised of dead and living shoots, stems and roots. This builds up when the grass is producing debris faster than it can be broken down. This happens when your soil does not contain the proper microorganisms to break them down, with certain pesticide applications, over aggressive fertilization.

**Chinch Bugs** – is a pest that can cause major damage to St. Augustine grass very quickly if not treated properly with the correct pesticide and monitored closely. Other vulnerabilities include diseases such as gray leaf spot, large patch and root rot.

There are several different varieties or cultivars of St. Augustine Sod. Some of these are:

**Floritam** – this is a variety of St. Augustine produced jointly by the University of Florida and Texas A&M, giving it the name combination of Flor-a-TAM. It is the most widely produced variety of St. Augustine in Florida. It possesses a coarser texture but is also less tolerant to cold and shade and thrives in at least 6 hours of sunlight each day. It provides a lawn height of 3.5-4 inches. It is susceptible to the same pests and diseases as mentioned above.



**Palmetto** – this variety of St. Augustine is considered a “semi-dwarf” variety. It has shorter growth than others but is slightly larger than the “dwarf” varieties. It does well in partial sun to partial shade. Palmetto tends to be a lighter green in color and provides a lawn height of 3-3.5 inches. It is also susceptible to the same pests and diseases as mentioned above

**Captiva** – A dwarf variety of St. Augustine, Captiva is fairly new, released in 2007 by the Florida Agricultural Experiment Station. It has a slower growing time as its leaves are short and narrow allowing for less mowing. It has exhibited a tolerance for cinch bugs as compared to other varieties. It is, however, particularly susceptible to diseases especially if over watered or aggressively fertilized. It has a better shade tolerance and provides a lawn height of 2-2.5 inches.

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**Bermuda** – Because of its fine texture and excellent tolerances to wear, drought and salt, Bermuda grass is often used on golf courses, in commercial landscapes and on athletic fields. It is a vigorous, low-growing, fine to medium blade turf grass that can outgrow most weeds and is a great option for situations without irrigation. It is one of the best options for areas of high traffic because of its strength.

Some disadvantages to Bermuda grass come mostly with poor tolerance to many insects, diseases and pests which can limit their use. They also grow very aggressively and can invade plant beds quickly if not maintained. Their fast growth also contributes to Thatch and it is not very shade tolerant. Bermuda generally turns brown in winter when dormant but can be over seeded with rye to provide a green lawn during winter.

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**Bahia** – The second most common grass in the Central Florida area, Bahia is a good all-purpose turf grass. It has excellent drought tolerance and is preferred in areas where little maintenance is desired as it sustains better than others in sandy, infertile soils. It does not produce excess thatch and it can be grown from seed in large lots or on acreage, although it also may take some time to cover large areas or acreage. It will however, turn brown in dormancy in extended droughts until conditions become favorable for regrowth. It provides a 3-4 inch lawn height.

Bahia has relatively low susceptibility to disease and pests. It does form those tall, seed heads throughout the summer and fall that leave those black seeds all over you when you walk through. Regular mowing will help to control this although it can wear out mower blades because of the tough stems. Bahia is not a good option for excessive traffic or shade and does not do well in saltwater areas. Sparse areas will allow for weed encroachment.

**Centipede** – As its name suggest, Centipede grass is a turf grass that grows slowly close to the ground. It is a medium texture and is generally a lighter color than other grasses. Centipede is more adapted to Northern and Central Florida than areas of South Florida. It does well in acidic, infertile soils and goes dormant in hot temperatures vs in winter. This will result in a brown yard in summertime. It does well in cooler temperatures and is fairly low maintenance. Centipede provides a 1.5-2 inch lawn height.

Some disadvantages to Centipede grass are its susceptibility to damage from nematodes and scale insects along with a specific fungal disease called centipedegrass decline. This is caused by improper maintenance over a period of time and can result in large areas of lawn dying. It is also susceptible to thatch.

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**Zoysia** – Originally introduced to the United States from Asia, Zoysiagrass can provide a beautiful lawn with fine, dense blades with a soft feeling. It maintains a nice deep green until dormant and provide for a 1-2 inch lawn height. It is typically a bit more difficult to maintain with more frequent waterings, mowing and necessary fertilizing to keep but once it is established, it will create a stunning lawn. Zoysiagrass has many different varieties that have been improved over the years for different characteristics and qualities. One of the most popular in Florida is Empire Zoysia. It does well in sandy conditions and grows aggressively. It is more drought resistant than other varieties but will not do as well in shady areas. Zoysiagrass maintains a good tolerance to shade, salt and wear.

Other than higher maintenance, some things to consider with Zoysiagrass is that it is susceptible to some diseases and certain pests may be problematic. Pesticides can be used minimally when maintenance is done properly.

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**Buffalo** – With curling leaves and blue-green color, Buffalo grass can grow in many soil types and is extremely drought tolerant. It is native to the United States and covers western prairies, where the buffalo once roamed. It is low maintenance as it is low growing and requires little watering. It cannot handle areas that receive abundant rainfall as over saturations will weaken it and leave it susceptible to disease.

Buffalo is not a good option for high traffic areas. It also does not do well in the shade. Some older varieties have seed heads which can be troublesome.



## What To Install

Now that we have covered most of the varieties of sod that are available and widely used here in Central Florida and you have some pros and cons of each, it is time to consider which you want to install for your new lawn that will best meet your needs. You can reference the previous section when making your considerations.

*Here are some questions to ask yourself:*

**1.** One of the very first things you will need to do is to take an assessment of your lawn and the terrain of your property. Do you have any low-lying areas that might have drain issues? Do you have mostly full sun or a mostly shady yard with nice shade trees?

You should also have a soil test done to determine which varieties it will support and what type of additional fertilizers you may need to apply. Grasses need their own fertilizer but you may have to add nutrients to your soil as well to support lawn establishment of the type of turf grass you choose.

Depending on what your lawn assessment provides you can move forward with making your choice within those turf grasses that you believe will do well within your environment.

**2.** Do you wish to have that highly manicured look, an average lawn or maybe on with more natural plants species and less turf grass? This will help determine not only what type of sod to install but also what type of landscaping you might plan to add in the future.

**3.** What look do you want? Grasses range from fine to coarse and vary in density as well. Consider this when envisioning your perfect lawn. If you are planning on a thick, dense grass and end up with fine, it may not be all that you imagined. As well, grasses vary in optimal height and this will affect your desired aesthetic.

**4.** Are you planning on a high traffic lawn with kids, dogs, football in the yard and family cookouts? You will want to choose a variety with high wear tolerance that will withstand lots of foot traffic.



**5.** How much time and effort are you willing to put into maintenance? This is probably the biggest component of your decision. Some high maintenance lawns can require fertilizer as much as monthly and mowing as much as twice per week or more. Mowing height is very important for the best quality grass. *This is an important factor to consider.* Decide what amount of time you can reasonably apply or if you are willing to take on the additional cost of hiring a professional Orlando Landscaper to maintain your lawns needs. As a general rule of thumb, the more watering and fertilizing your lawn needs, the amounts of mowing and pest control will increase as well. Also keep in mind that some grasses require supplemental watering during drought and this can be a challenge or require an irrigation system be installed prior to installing sod.

**6.** Investment.- Although a sod installation can be expensive, you want to consider what will serve you best as a long term investment. Keep in mind maintenance needs. As well, be aware that some turf grasses can only be installed by vegetative propagation (sod, sprigs or plugs) and seeds is not available or it will not germinate properly while other types will produce available seed to use in sparse areas or to assist in establishment if you encounter issues.







## Maintaining Your New Lawn

After you have made a decision and your new lawn is freshly laid, all the fun of establishing begins. It is very important to mind your sod attentively in the weeks after installation to ensure a good establishment of a root system.

**Watering** is vital. Make sure to water your sod immediately after installation if you are doing it yourself. Also, water twice a day for the first month after installation for about thirty minutes each time. The best times for watering are early morning and early afternoon. Watering after dark can sit and be cause for disease.

**Mowing** should be postponed until you are sure that your sod has rooted. You can check by lifting up on a piece gently. Gauge the resistance you feel when lifting. If it seems reasonably hard to lift, then your grass has started rooting and is safe to mow. It is important to maintain your lawn height as recommended for the type of sod you choose. Species vary and you want to maintain recommended height to support optimal turf grass health.

**Fertilizing** is a must in the sandy soil of Central Florida. There is no turf grass that will not benefit from regular fertilizing and some require it to maintain overall health. Quarterly maintenance is a good rule of thumb, but keep in mind not to fertilize during the hot months for Summer. A soil test will help determine any additional nutrients you might need in addition to the type of fertilizer that is appropriate for the type of sod you chose for installation.

We are lucky here in Central Florida to have the research and study of the University of Florida's Institute of Food & Agricultural to provide an endless supply of information at our fingertips on Florida natural resources. They have a great Homeowner Best Management Practices that includes more information on fertilizing including in depth selection, timing and other tips.



## Pesticides and Weed Killers

It is very important after a new sod installation to make sure you are using appropriate types of pesticides and weed killers for your type of sod before application. Using the wrong kind for your sod variety or the right kind too soon can be disastrous. Of course, the best method is to maintain a proper environment through maintenance that will hinder pests, weeds and disease. Sometimes it is inevitable though to be required to treat a condition in your sod before it causes major damage.

Avoid any chemicals on your sod within the first two weeks after installation. Post emergent (after you see the weeds) herbicides are best for this purpose. Pre-emergent varieties are frowned upon for new sod installations as they can prevent rooting and can be the wrong time of year based on the best time for installation. High quality sod should be weed free and guaranteed so. However, if you didn't assure all weeds in the soil were killed prior to installation, they can become an issue in your new sod quickly.

For pest, you will use a pesticide. Pests usually are not present in newly installed sod and again, your sod should be guaranteed to be pest free. However, do not use pesticide on newly installed sod. It kills the good bugs too that will be helping to balance the ecology of your soil to become optimal for rooting. Pests become more of a problem with warmer weather. Pesticides generally will not harm established grass because they are chemically designed for ridding pest and not for grass.





## Seasonal Tips

Here are some seasonal tips to keep in mind when it comes to your new Central Florida sod installation:

**Fall/Winter** - Fall and Winter seasons bring cooler weather, less water and slower growing or dormant lawns.

- ➔ Avoid fertilizer after September even though we might still have some warm temperatures. Timing for fertilizer is imperative.
- ➔ Water early in the day to avoid lawn wetness and apply fungicides if you have repeated issues with fungus.
- ➔ Watch for bugs. Certain types of worms called webworms can cause serious damage with little time for recovery before grasses go dormant.
- ➔ Overseeding can maintain a green lawn in winter and then die off as spring gets warmer and your sod begins to grow again.

**Spring/Summer** – Spring and Summer here in Central Florida are peak times for lawn maintenance. Keep these tips in mind.

- ➔ Get your irrigation system checked if you have one. Make sure it is fully operational and take care of any needed repairs ahead of time. Likely, you didn't use it much over the winter and it can experience cracking or damage when unused and in colder temperatures.
- ➔ Get your lawn equipment up and running. Get lawn mower blades sharpened. This is vital. Sharp blades cut clean and allow the blades of grass to seal properly which will help avoid disease and pest issues.
- ➔ If you do have any bare or sparse areas, Spring is the time to supplement with plugs or new pieces of sod that will establish with the rest of your lawn.



## Conclusion

A new sod installation for your lawn is a big deal. We hope that we have provided you some real tools to help you along your journey. Remember to do an assessment of your lawn, decide which type of sod is going to work best for your area, determine the amount of maintenance you desire to take on or pay for and be sure to do your part in contributing to the overall health of your sod. If you keep these things in mind when making your decision, the investment of a new sod installation will last for many years into the future. A beautiful lawn will add value to your home and will be a place to make wonderful memories of enjoying the outdoor spaces of your home.

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### Additional Resources Available Online include:

Roedell's' - [LANDSCAPING ASSESSMENT & PLANNING CHECKLIST](#)

Roedell's' - [WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE HIRING A LANDSCAPER](#)

Roedell's' - [ROCK AND MULCH CALCULATOR](#)

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