Bermuda Grass

Yuma is considered one of the top Bermuda grass seed production areas in the world.

Bermuda grass is a major seed crop planted on America’s lawns, sports fields and golf courses around the Southern U.S. and in tropical and subtropical regions around the world.

It is also grown for hay, meadows and pastures, and for erosion control on levees and fields. World usage of the crop has increased 40 percent with the entry of certified proprietary varieties in the marketplace.

Bermuda can make as much as 1,000 pounds of seed per acre.

Most of the world’s supply of registered Bermuda grass seed is grown in Yuma County. There are few other spots known where Bermuda grass will even produce viable seed.

During the period 1940-1952, when irrigation water was obtained from wells which were becoming more saline each year, this crop was the mainstay of farmers and kept them in business until Colorado River water arrived.

Bermuda grass is named after the Atlantic islands of the same name. The grass is a perennial and lives from year to year without replanting.

Bermuda is propagated by means of seeds, jointed rootstocks, and aerial runners which take root at each joint.

Seed produced in humid climates does not produce as much viable seed as the dry desert southwest.

Bermuda grass is very hardy after once becoming established, living for months without moisture, and it is on record that it lived for over two years when submerged by the Salton Sea (Imperial Valley, Calif.) making renewed growth when the water evaporated.

Bermuda is also a stubborn weed in the arid desert southwest and can be very hard to eradicate when established in cultivated fields.

The Giant Bermuda is a grass that is an excellent source of feed. Standing tall and erect the mature plant grows up to 40 inches in height producing a fine-stemmed, leafy, nutritious forage.

Four to Five cuttings a year are possible with Giant Bermuda with applied Nitrogen, a key factor in total tonnage production.

With proper management, a cutting or grazing can be made as early as 50 days after seeding a Bermuda grass field.

Once established, Bermuda grass dominates the pasture providing growth in medium fertility and drought areas. If fertilized and irrigated it grows prolifically and needs to be harvested approximately every five weeks for the maximum forage benefit.

Prescribed burning during the dormant period prior to spring growth will remove excess dead forage; warm the soil; destroy some insects, winter weeds, and weedy grasses; and promote faster greenup. Timing is critical and must be done after weeds have emerged but before Bermuda grass greenup. Waiting too long delays Bermuda grass regrowth and allows for emerging weeds to outgrow the grass.
Most of the Bermuda grass planted in the state are hybrids that grow from early spring to late fall. These hybrids are responsive to good and balanced fertilization producing high yields. Producers are attracted to Bermuda grass because of its high yield, persistence and good adaptation under grazing. Some seeded types also have good yields but none so high as the hybrids.

Bermuda grass has excellent agronomic characteristics making it a popular perennial forage grown in much of the desert southwest. The grass has high-yielding ability, high-drought resistance, and sufficiently tolerates highly-alkaline soils.

The improved hybrid Bermuda grasses (Cynodon dactylon L.) are used for both hay and grazing. Coastal was the first hybrid Bermuda grass developed at the Coastal Plain Experiment Station in Tifton, Georgia, and was released in 1943. Several other Bermuda grass varieties have been developed since then by both public agencies and private companies. Hybrid Bermuda grasses have been popular for hay production because they are very responsive to nitrogen fertilizer, have high yield potential and usually dry or cure faster than most other forages that could be used for hay.

In 1989, Cebeco International Seeds, Inc. and Arizona Grain Inc. entered into a cooperative breeding program in C. dactylon for turf and forage grass improvement. The seeded Bermuda grass industry based in the southwestern US is dominated by a single land race Arizona Common (16-18 million lbs. annually).

Like almost all of our turfgrass Bermuda species, Bermuda grass is an introduced plant to the United States. The origin of the first introduction of Bermuda grass most likely came from contaminated hay, which was used as bedding, when slaves were brought to America.

Bermuda grass plants were then used exclusively for forage purposes for hundreds of years, and also as a lawn grass, even though seed was sold mostly for forage. Bermuda grass was used in the southern United States in the early 1900's as a golf course turf, and was used as an "alternative" for sand greens, which were exactly that – a putting surface comprised of sand, with no grass!

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