



Bahiagrass—A Natural Fit For Golf Course Roughs In The South

By Todd Lowe, agronomist, Southeast Region | August 4, 2017



Superior drought tolerance makes bahiagrass (left side of path) an excellent turfgrass for rough areas that seldom receive play.

When it comes to turfgrasses on golf courses in the South, bermudagrass is king. Its fine leaf texture, density and wide range of acceptable mowing heights makes it an ideal candidate for golf courses in warm climates.

However, maintained bermudagrass requires regular irrigation, fertilization, mowing, cultivation and occasional chemical treatments. With the growing importance of resource management, many southern golf courses are seeking ways to decrease their acreage of maintained bermudagrass.

The most common form of reducing maintained rough acreage is to naturalize areas that seldom receive play. Many courses have removed bermudagrass and replaced it with plants like cordgrass or aggregate “waste areas.” However, naturalized plantings can be difficult to play from and waste areas may not be appealing to some facilities, so many golf courses are looking for other alternatives.

Bahiagrass is a drought-tolerant turfgrass that grows well in infertile, sandy soils. In fact, bahiagrass is widely used in pastures, roadsides and other utility areas due to its low water

requirements and ability to withstand poor growing conditions. However, current bahiagrass varieties, such as Argentine and Pensacola, are rather uneven in playing quality and create tall, unsightly seedheads when left unmown for several weeks.

[USGA-funded research](#) at the University of Florida is helping develop turf-type bahiagrasses with finer leaf texture and improved turf density and uniformity. Several varieties are quite promising; showing excellent color, reduced vertical growth and very few seedheads. However, until these improved varieties are released, current bahiagrass varieties still offer sustainable alternatives for bermudagrass rough in areas that receive little play.

Bahiagrass can provide considerable water savings over bermudagrass because bahiagrass requires no irrigation once it establishes. Its ability to tolerate sandy, infertile soil also means that it requires less fertility than bermudagrass. Bahiagrass also tolerates low rates of the herbicide glyphosate, which can be used to help reduce mowing and herbicide costs.

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