



*No irrigation was installed in the new bahiagrass rough at the Country Club of Mobile. Bahiagrass is drought tolerant and is helping this facility become more sustainable.*

## BAHIAGRASS: A NEW ROUGH TURFGRASS ARRIVES IN THE SOUTHEAST

BY PATRICK O'BRIEN | AGRONOMIST, SOUTHEAST REGION

I had the opportunity to visit the recently renovated Country Club of Mobile in Alabama. This historic Donald Ross design was totally renovated last year. What made this renovation so unique from my perspective was the use of bahiagrass for the rough turf. Typically, bermudagrass is used for rough areas in the Southeast. In more than 40 years of traveling to golf courses, this is the first major use of bahiagrass that I have ever witnessed.

Bahiagrass is a very sustainable turfgrass because performs well in unirrigated areas with minimal fertilizer required after establishment. Bahiagrass also has a much deeper root system than other lawn turf species and has excellent resistance to most insects and fungal diseases. As a result, bahiagrass is mainly used for low-maintenance lawns, pastures and roadsides in many areas of the Southeast. However, turfgrass breeding efforts have led to new bahiagrasses for golf course use. The major objection to bahiagrass use on golf courses has been the tall, unattractive seedheads.

At the Country Club of Mobile, a total of 65 acres of Argentine bahiagrass was sodded in the rough areas. The sod was purchased from a local supplier at a cost of approximately \$10,000 per acre. This replaced the Tifway bermudagrass rough that required regular irrigation, fertilization, mowing and cultivation. Here are some initial observations about the new bahiagrass rough:

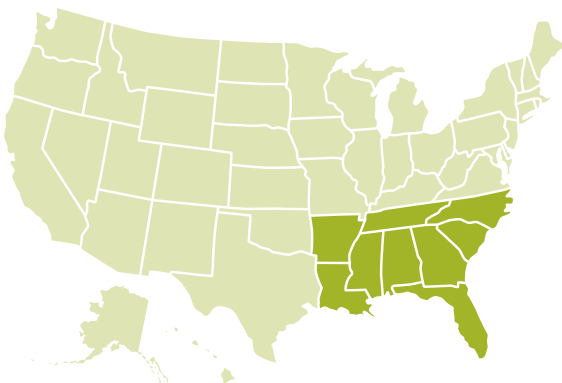
- No irrigation was installed in the rough areas, leading to a 30-40 percent reduction in annual water consumption and electrical pumping costs.
- The irrigation costs for the entire renovation project was reduced by \$200,000 by not installing sprinklers in bahiagrass areas.
- The rough is now mowed weekly at a 2-inch height of cut.
- Darker green leaf color of the bahiagrass provides a brilliant contrast to the Tifway bermudagrass fairways.



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Dr. Kevin Kenworthy, turfgrass breeder at the University of Florida, recently initiated a bahiagrass breeding program with financial support from the USGA. The development of an improved turf-type bahiagrass with finer leaf texture, improved density and fewer seedheads could have a remarkable impact on golf facilities in the Southeast. Stay tuned for further developments from this breeding program.



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