

Gardening Guru: 'Empire' zoysia's lack of thirstiness makes it goodchoice

By George Rogers, Ph.d.
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Recently in this column, we looked at zoysia turf, pointing out that: South Florida is not generally regarded as zoysia country; the grass is quirky; and there are ongoing efforts to develop new, South Florida-friendly selections.

That article led me to take a more focused look at a new-ish zoysia coming on the scene here. To avoid overstating my case, please note that my only experience with *Zoysia japonica* "Empire" is having noticed its hot sales locally, its South Florida installations, the promotions and its good looks. The grass has had about six years history in South Florida to prove itself.

Unlike most zoysias, which are more closely associated with the North, the 'Empire' version was developed in Brazil to survive in hot, humid conditions.

Unlike most zoysias, which are more Northern at heart, Empire was developed in Brazil for hot, humid situations. Empire's main claim to fame is un-thirstiness. When dried out severely, it merely goes dormant.

Most zoysias are prickly, stiff, thatchy, slow to expand, and mowed with a reel mower. But Empire's blades are comparatively soft and nice and mowable with a rotary mower. In addition, Empire produces rhizomes and thus expands and recovers from injury more quickly than most other zoysias.

Although I don't have scientific evidence, conversations with more experienced turfologists indicate that it is free of the thatchiness and tendency to form humps, so characteristic of other zoysias. (And, so far, no complaints about bugs or disease.)

Empire comes to us via the same company responsible for the well-known "Palmetto" St. Augustine: Sod Solutions Inc. The company has an informative Web site: www.sodsolutions.com

Meyers Turf on North Military Trail in Riviera Beach is a principal local outlet. If you're nice, the people there might let you kick off your shoes and wiggle your toes in its soft green lushness while answering questions about costs (reasonable) and other details.

I don't know about you, but my annoying St. Augustine lawn sharpens my interest in low-water, low-chemical, low-maintenance alternatives. The world of South Florida turf is evolving rapidly, and Empire looks like progress. Keep an eye on this intriguing new option.

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