



2011 TURF TRANSITION SPECIAL

Professional Landscape Management

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DESERT SOUTHWEST TURF TRANSITION TIME (WINTER TO SUMMER)

Over the years Rye grass has been planted in the desert southwest to provide green winter lawns. The demand for this is huge and the market very competitive to provide the best seed for this purpose. Rye grass has been sold in blends for years creating some of the most durable winter lawns ever. Blends incorporate seeds from Rye species that are specifically produced for different favorable attributes such as quick germination, disease resistant, and drought tolerant. This combination has grown in popularity because of the beautiful lawns that are grown.

Having said that, the down side is that over the years of making Rye grass more durable, it is harder to transition from the winter rye to the summer Bermuda grass. Transition consists of killing off the Rye and encouraging the Bermuda to grow. Part of the transition is natural due to higher temperatures that Rye grass cannot tolerate. In years past, allowing the Rye to naturally die out was fairly effective. As the Rye died off, the Bermuda filled in keeping the over all appearance green but somewhat discolored due to the different shade of each turf species.

As the Rye has gotten more resilient, it has been harder to transition naturally. Keeping in mind that Bermuda needs at least 100 days of active strong growth and 8 hours of direct sunlight to thrive, allowing the Rye to remain is detrimental to the over all health of the summer Bermuda lawn. A more aggressive approach is now needed to produce a beneficial transition for the aesthetic appearance and the health of the Bermuda.

Transition will begin with Rye grass heights being lowered during regular mowing intervals to allow more and more sunlight to warm the soil and "wake up" the Bermuda roots. Once the height is at or about 2" and the soil temperatures are reaching the low to mid 60's, irrigation will be stopped for approximately one week to stress the Rye grass. The turf will be inspected for Bermuda activity and Rye grass stress. Once it reaches a point that the Bermuda can out perform the Rye, water will be turned back on and the Bermuda will be fertilized. This is also the best time to aerate. That will allow the deep roots of the Bermuda to receive the optimum amount of water and fertilizer that will boost recovery. Aeration creates small holes in the soil that break up surface tension and hard pan while allowing sun, water, and nutrients to reach the roots. Regular aeration also helps the Bermuda spread more easily to thicken up and grow deeper roots which help the become more drought tolerant. This reduces the amount of water needed to sustain healthy turf.

Soon you will see the transition beginning with shorter mowing height, followed by the turf turning grayish or brown, and then water added to rejuvenate the dormant Bermuda. This process will take up to 3 weeks to fully wake up the Bermuda but the results will be well worth it.



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