

## **Should we lower our expectations for a Florida lawn?**

A weed is simply a plant out-of-place or an unwanted plant. For example, Bermudagrass is intentionally planted on some golf course greens. In this case it is wanted and is not considered out-of-place. But if the same plant is found growing in a vegetable garden, it is considered out-of-place and is unwanted.

There are over 100 common weeds found in Florida lawns. It's interesting that many of these weeds are native to Florida or at least the Southeast. The lawn grasses are not native.

Many of our weeds are native. Some weeds carry our State's name. Some examples are Florida bellflower, Florida betony (rattlesnake weed), Florida Pellitory, Florida Pusley and Florida yellow woodsorrel.

Bermudagrass is native to Africa. Bahiagrass is native to South America. Centipedegrass was introduced from southeastern Asia. Carpetgrass was brought to the U.S. from the West Indies. Zoysiagrass is native to the Asia. St. Augustinegrass was discovered growing in South Carolina in 1788. Its origin is not known prior to this time; however, it is believed to be native outside of North America.

Nature insists on diversity. Florida of all the states has the greatest wealth of native plants suitable for use in our landscapes. Northwest Florida was nothing more than a forest.

When you remove this diversity to create a large expanse of lawn, you will pay a price. In the native ecosystem, this diversity of plants provides a natural pest control. Most pests have a certain group of plants on which they feed. When you remove the diversity and plant nothing but the same plant, you are favoring the few pests that feed on that one plant. And, as a result, their population explodes.

A lawn is a monoculture system. The "critter" that happens to find a lawn environment no longer has to "work for a living"; food is no longer a limiting factor. There are over 5 million acres of home lawns in Florida.

Many of the weeds that we battle are doing nothing more than trying to regain their own territory. They were here first. Their seeds continually blow in, are brought in by birds and other wildlife, come up from dormant tubers and roots under the turf, are brought in by topsoil and other plants that you bring into your landscape, etc.

I'm not saying that we shouldn't grow lawns. But perhaps our expectations for our lawns are too high. Use grass where it's needed, where it serves a purpose. And even though we do have some tools to help battle the weeds and other lawn pests, if you set out to have that "perfect" lawn, be ready to do battle with nature, a continual and lifelong battle.

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