

Arkansas Certification Program for Vegetatively Propagated Turfgrass Varieties

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Sod production near Little Rock, Ark.

Photo by Fred Miller

Summary. In January 2007, the varietal certification program for vegetatively (sod, sprigs, plugs) propagated turfgrass was revised and updated by the Arkansas State Plant Board (ASPB) Seed Division to comply with AOSCA (Association of Official Seed Certifying Agencies) standards. The voluntary program provides a method to verify the genetic source and purity, as well as quality of, vegetative turfgrasses sold in Arkansas. The ASPB turfgrass certification program was revised because turfgrass cultivars were being sold under differing names, consumers were unsure which cultivar they were purchasing, and breeders of new cultivars, along with consumers, needed a guarantee of turfgrass quality and

genetic purity. The result of a turfgrass variety (cultivar) certification program is assurance of a quality product that has an unbroken chain of traceability back to a pure source of seed or vegetative plant material. Bermudagrasses and zoysiagrasses are currently being grown under the turfgrass certification program by seven of Arkansas' 53 sod farms. Certified tags (blue tags) or labels, issued by the ASPB accompany the certified turfgrass shipments for inspected and approved turfgrass cultivars.

Abbreviations: AOSCA, Association of Official Seed Certifying Agencies; ASPB, Arkansas State Plant Board.

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The Latin phrase *Caveat Emptor* is well-known by its English translation: Let the Buyer Beware. These few words have the power to change customer behavior, even to the point of avoiding a purchase due to fear of being sold low- or inconsistent-quality products. To protect consumers and businesses from poor-quality products, certification programs exist in practically every facet of business. Some well-known examples include USDA certified foods and the Underwriters Laboratory (UL-approved) stamp for electronic products. Numerous certification programs also exist for plant materials, including turfgrasses.

The Arkansas State Plant Board (ASPB) Seed Certification Program allows for voluntary participation in a program for varietal certification of agricultural seed and vegetatively (sod, sprigs, plugs) propagated turfgrasses. This program is distinct from the nursery-type “certifications”, which assure freedom from disease and insects or noxious plants, as required for interstate shipments. As a member of the Association of Official Seed Certifying Agencies (AOSCA), the ASPB turfgrass certification program follows field and seed standards for production of high-quality seed and sod that satisfy AOSCA requirements, which includes constant supervision of the production of turfgrass with the highest genetic and mechanical purity.

Sod producers participating in the varietal certification program are required to provide evidence of the variety (cultivar) of turfgrass planted, while trained Arkansas State Plant Board field inspectors conduct three or more inspections during the growing season to verify the characteristics of the breeder’s description for the variety, as well as the presence of weeds or other crops in the field. These rigid standards of quality have been established by the ASPB for three classes of certified turfgrass: Foundation, Registered, and Certified. Foundation stock is the vegetative increase of plant material from the breeder and these fields are not larger than 10 acres. Registered stock is the increase of foundation stock and these fields are not larger than 10 acres. Certified fields

are the increase of registered or foundation stock and are not limited by size. Detailed records are maintained for these three generations of turfgrass production, as well as for the original breeder generation. Certified tags (blue tags) or labels issued by the ASPB accompany the certified turfgrass shipments for inspected and approved turfgrass cultivars.

The result of a turfgrass variety certification program is assurance of a quality product that has an unbroken chain of traceability back to a pure source of seed or sod. Variety certification provides buyers the assurance of receiving a product that has been independently verified which is 1) true to variety, 2) without noxious weeds, and 3) inspected by trained inspectors. Also, breeders/originators of many new turfgrass cultivars require the owner/distributor to sell these cultivars as a class of certified sprigs or sod and participation in the ASPB turfgrass certification program satisfies this requirement.

Some of the reasons the ASPB turfgrass certification program was revised was because 1) cultivars were being sold under differing/confusing names, 2) consumers were unsure which variety they were purchasing, 3) consumers requested a greater guarantee of turfgrass quality and genetic purity, and 4) breeders of new cultivars were often requiring their cultivars to be in an AOSCA approved certification program as a condition of allowing those cultivars to be sold. The Arkansas turfgrass program standards were revised in January 2007 and are patterned similar to turfgrass certification programs in Georgia and other states. Field inspectors were trained in the identification of common turfgrass species and turfgrass weeds by the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service and turfgrass researchers. Additionally, breeder varietal descriptions and accurate information were obtained by the ASPB from university researchers and breeders. A summary of the correct cultivar names, experimental names, acceptable names, unacceptable names, scientific names, and common species names for bermudagrasses (*Cynodon* spp.) and zoysiagrasses (*Zoysia* spp.) grown in Arkansas

is provided in Table 1. Currently, several cultivars of bermudagrass and zoysiagrass are being grown under the turfgrass certification program (Table 1) by seven of Arkansas' 53 sod farms.

Persons wishing to participate in the ASPB turfgrass certification program should contact Mary Smith or James Chastain of the ASPB at (501) 225-1598. For more information about nursery inspections of turfgrasses provided by the Plant Board, including nursery inspections for interstate shipments or nursery certificates showing inspections conducted for noxious weeds and

fire ants on turfgrasses purchased with State of Arkansas funds, contact Terry Walker of the ASPB, Plant Industry Division, (501) 225-1598.

Literature Cited

Anderson, M.P., C.M. Taliaferro, D.L. Martin, and C.S. Anderson. 2001. Comparative DNA profiling of U-3 turf bermudagrass strains. *Crop Sci.* 41:1184-1189.

Table 1. Cultivar names, experimental names, acceptable names, unacceptable names, scientific names, and common species names for bermudagrasses and zoysiagrasses grown in Arkansas.

Cultivar name	Experimental name	Acceptable names	Unacceptable names	Species (scientific)	Species (common)
Celebration ^z	Riley's Super Sport	Celebration	other	<i>Cynodon dactylon</i>	Bermudagrass
Quickstand			Quicksand	<i>Cynodon dactylon</i>	Common bermudagrass
Miniverde ^z			other	<i>Cynodon dactylon</i> x <i>Cynodon transvaalensis</i>	Hybrid bermudagrass
Patriot	OKC 18-4	Patriot, Patriot (OKC 18-4)	other	<i>Cynodon dactylon</i> x <i>Cynodon transvaalensis</i>	Hybrid bermudagrass
Tifdwarf ^z		Tifdwarf	other	<i>Cynodon dactylon</i> x <i>Cynodon transvaalensis</i>	Hybrid bermudagrass
Tifgreen ^z	Tifton 328	Tifgreen, Tifgreen (Tifton 328)	Tifgreen 328, 328 bermudagrass, 328, Tifton 328, Tif 328	<i>Cynodon dactylon</i> x <i>Cynodon transvaalensis</i>	Hybrid bermudagrass
Tifsport ^z	Tift 94	Tifsport	other	<i>Cynodon dactylon</i> x <i>Cynodon transvaalensis</i>	Hybrid bermudagrass
Tifton-10 ^z	Tifton-10	Tifton-10	Tiff 10, T10	<i>Cynodon dactylon</i>	Common bermudagrass
Tifway ^z	Tifton 419	Tifway, Tifway (Tifton 419)	Tifway 419, 419 bermudagrass, 419, Tifton 419, Tif 419	<i>Cynodon dactylon</i> x <i>Cynodon transvaalensis</i>	Hybrid bermudagrass
Tifway II	Tifway mutant 71-126	Tifway II		<i>Cynodon dactylon</i> x <i>Cynodon transvaalensis</i>	Hybrid bermudagrass
U-3 ^y	U-3	U-3	U3	<i>Cynodon dactylon</i>	Common bermudagrass
Cavalier ^z	DALZ8507	Cavalier	other	<i>Zoysia matrella</i>	Zoysiagrass or Manilagrass
Crowne ^z	DALZ8512	Crowne	other	<i>Zoysia japonica</i>	Zoysiagrass or Japanese lawnglass
Diamond ^z	DALZ8502	Diamond	other	<i>Zoysia matrella</i>	Zoysiagrass or Manilagrass
El Toro ^z	UCR#1	El Toro	other	<i>Zoysia japonica</i>	Zoysiagrass or Japanese lawnglass
Himeno ^z		Himeno		<i>Zoysia japonica</i>	Zoysiagrass or Japanese lawnglass
Meyer ^z	Z-52	Meyer, Meyer (Z-52)	Z-52, Amazoy, Meyers	<i>Zoysia japonica</i>	Zoysiagrass or Japanese lawnglass
Palisades ^z	DALZ8514	Palisades	other	<i>Zoysia japonica</i>	Zoysiagrass or Japanese lawnglass
Royal	DALZ9006	Royal	other	<i>Zoysia matrella</i>	Zoysiagrass or Manilagrass
Zorro ^z	DALZ8510 or 9601	Zorro	other	<i>Zoysia matrella</i>	Zoysiagrass or Manilagrass

^z Available as blue tag certified sod in Arkansas as of 1/2/2008.

^y not available as certified sod due to mechanical contamination of U-3 foundation nursery (Anderson et al., 2001).