

# Bermuda Grass (*Cynodon dactylon*)

## What is Bermuda Grass?

Bermuda grass is a low-growing, wiry perennial weed with shoots aboveground (stolons) and belowground (rhizomes). The plant spreads by shoots rooting to form a new plant in moist soil and by setting seed.



## What is the damage caused?

Like other weeds, Bermuda grass competes with agricultural plants for light, water and nutrients, often resulting in crop plant stunting and lower crop yield, as well as harboring insect pests that spread disease. If left untreated, Bermuda grass will spread quickly, and choke out potential crop growing spaces. After flowering and setting seed, Bermuda grass seeds will remain dormant in the soil, and is capable of germinating for many years if rain or irrigation occurs.

## How to manage Bermuda Grass?

Bermuda grass can be managed nonchemically with a persistent program of removal by cultivation and by withholding water during the summer to desiccate the stolons and rhizomes.

### Cultural controls:

- If possible, withhold water to the dry grass stems. Spade the affected area two or three times during summer months to bring the rhizomes to the surface where they dry out. Rake out any visible rhizomes and stolons.
- Prevent the spread of Bermuda grass by killing and removing plants before they go to seed.
- Increase crop plant density in order to encourage crop plants to outcompete Bermuda grass for sunlight.
- Apply weed seed-free mulch around crop plants to reduce light access for weeds.
- Cover grass-infected areas with clear plastic sheeting during periods of high solar radiation. This will desiccate weeds and kill Bermuda grass seed near the soil surface. The plastic should extend roughly 2 feet beyond the Bermuda grass stolons and remain intact for 4 to 6 weeks. If possible, cut grass and remove clippings, then irrigate before applying plastic. This technique is called soil solarization. To learn more information about it see the "Soil Solarization" factsheet.

### Herbicide controls:

There are two basic types of herbicides that can kill mature Bermuda grass: nonselective (that kill most plant species) and grass-selective (that only kill plants in the grass family (Poaceae)). Herbicides can provide excellent weed control when used correctly; however, when used incorrectly they can be harmful to the crop and the environment. When using herbicides, always follow label instructions and use with great care.

| Ingredient             | Selection Category | Water Quality and Run-Off Risk | Acute Human Toxicity | Additional comments   |
|------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|---|
| <b>Sethoxydim</b>      | Grass-Selective    | Moderate                       | Low                  | Apply in early spring, when Bermuda grass growth is less than 15 cm in length.  |
| <b>Pelargonic Acid</b> | Nonselective       | Moderate/High                  | Low                  | Kills green stems and leaves but does not eliminate rhizome. Apply very carefully as this chemical kills any vegetation that it contacts.                     |
| <b>Glyphosate</b>      | Nonselective       | Moderate                       | Low                  | Apply directly to uncut, vigorously growing weeds in the late summer, when plant food storage is in the roots. Spade and rake out Bermuda grass after 7 days. |

\*Toxicity information from University of Hertfordshire: <http://sitem.herts.ac.uk/aeru/ppdb/>