



'El Toro' Zoysiagrass vs. Seashore Paspalum

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'El Toro' zoysiagrass and seashore paspalum are two of the more popular species of turfgrass that are being used for home lawns in the past few years here in Hawai'i. Each species has its own special characteristics, and a comparison of the two may help in deciding which is best for your location and personal preferences.

Both El Toro and seashore paspalum have a very dense growth habit, spreading by stolons and underground rhizomes, resulting in a thick carpet of turf that tends to choke out all other grasses and weeds. Both are so aggressive that they may grow under sidewalks, over curbs or small walls, and into flowerbeds or other areas where they are unwanted. Seashore paspalum is similar to bermudagrass in appearance, but with a slightly wider blade and a darker green, shiny, waxy appearance of the blades. El Toro has an even wider blade and a medium green color that more closely resembles centipedegrass. 'Z-3' is another zoysia variety similar to El Toro that was selected here in Hawai'i at Quality Turfgrass in Waimānalo. It has shorter, soft leaves with a medium-fine texture and a medium-green color. It is slower growing than El Toro and will also build some thatch when mowed above 1 inch.

Zoysia and seashore paspalum grow best in full sun but both tolerate partial shade reasonably well. Neither will do well in heavy shade. El Toro and seashore paspalum are both very wear-tolerant; however, once worn down, El Toro takes much longer to recover. This is due to a much faster growth rate for seashore paspalum, which can also tolerate very high salinity levels, more than most horticultural plants can survive. This allows for it to be

irrigated with high-salt, non-potable sources of water. Zoysia is moderately salt tolerant and can be grown along sandy seashores, where drainage is adequate.

El Toro and seashore paspalum have similar water requirements. Both are reasonably drought-tolerant but require adequate irrigation for best appearance. Once established, they should receive deep irrigation once every 3–4 days, depending on soil type and season. Paspalum can tolerate waterlogged soil conditions much better than El Toro.

Although there are a few seeded varieties of zoysia-grass and paspalum, vegetative establishment is most commonly used for both. Each can be sodded, but the more economical methods for home lawns for El Toro is by sod plugs. Plug squares of 3–4 inches are usually planted at 12-inch intervals and allowed to grow together as the runners spread between plugs. This may take 4–5 months or more, depending on the season. Seashore paspalum can be established by spreading freshly harvested stolons over the entire planting area, followed by some type of mulching to keep them moist. Full establishment may take only 4–6 weeks, depending on the weather, since the growth rate of paspalum is so rapid. Seashore Paspalum is usually less expensive to establish.

A few seeded types of zoysia that resemble El Toro are available, but the overall quality is less than El Toro, showing a somewhat uneven growth pattern and a tendency to form mounds. A new seeded variety of paspalum called 'Seaspray' has shown some promise but is reported to be slow in establishing.

Mowing probably influences the general appearance of any turfgrass more by mowing than any other factor. Mowing height, frequency of mowing, the kind of mowing equipment, and thatch removal are important factors to consider. The recommended mowing height for seashore paspalum is between $\frac{3}{8}$ and $\frac{3}{4}$ inch. El Toro

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requirement is from $\frac{1}{2}$ to $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches. All grass should be mowed often enough to remove no more than one third of the blade length. If cut infrequently at heights above the recommended height, both species will form a growth pattern that produces a puffy, tufted, dense mat with a deep thatch. This type of lawn is very difficult to mow, resulting in severe scalping and tearing of the tufted turf, and it can easily damage the lawnmower. Therefore, for best appearance, El Toro lawns should be mowed every 7–14 days and paspalum every 5–10 days at heights within the recommended ranges. The optimum mowing height for El Toro lawns is $\frac{3}{4}$ inch and for seashore paspalum, $\frac{1}{2}$ inch. A heavy reel-type mower must be used if mowing below 1 inch. A rotary mower will do an acceptable job at heights above 1 inch if the lawn is cut at least once a week. Frequent mower adjustment and blade sharpening are important for desirable turfgrass quality.

One of the main problems with seashore paspalum lawns is a rapid build-up of thatch. El Toro builds thatch more slowly. Heavy thatch gives the lawn an uneven, clumpy appearance. If the grass has been consistently cut above the recommended height, much of this material will consist of long, brown stems and rhizomes. Thatch accumulation can be decreased by frequent mowing nearer the low range of the recommended heights and by avoiding over-watering and excessive applications of nitrogen fertilizer. Seashore paspalum may need annual verticutting to control thatch. This requires a period of recovery before the lawn returns to an acceptable appearance, and it should be done during the spring or summer months.

El Toro and paspalum do not require frequent N fertilization after the establishment period. When a thick, mature turf is established, one to three applications per year of a complete fertilizer (slow-release N is best), at a rate of 1 pound nitrogen per 1000 square feet at each application, is adequate for both. The objective when fertilizing any lawn is to produce a slow-growing, healthy, attractive turf requiring as little mowing and maintenance as possible. An occasional application of iron and micronutrients will result in an immediate “greening-up” without producing an increased growth rate.

An established, well maintained turf may have very few weed problems, but there may be occasions where weed control measures become necessary. El Toro is tolerant of many of the postemergent herbicides that are commercially available, but seashore paspalum is very sensitive to many of them. Preemergence herbicides can be used in all established turfgrasses on a regular basis as a preventive measure to control weeds before they become a problem.

See also . . .

Calculating the amount of fertilizer needed for your lawn
<http://www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/oc/freepubs/pdf/TM-9.pdf>

Seashore paspalum

<http://www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/oc/freepubs/pdf/TM-1.pdf>

Zoysiagrass

<http://www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/oc/freepubs/pdf/TM-8.pdf>

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