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BEST of Both Worlds

Wayne Hanna is the mastermind behind TifGrand bermudagrass, which performs well in shade and should be widely available in 2010.

New bermudagrass performs well in the sun and the shade

by Don Dale

Wayne Hanna has done it again. He's come out with a new bermudagrass, and this one goes where other bermudagrasses don't go—in the shade.

Dubbed TifGrand, the new bermudagrass from the University of Georgia Research Foundation, Inc. is a high-quality hybrid from a different line of crosses than the university's earlier releases, such as TifSport and TifEagle. This one has a number of good qualities, but the trait that is giving it rave reviews even before it has found commercial square footage is its adaptability to shade.

As a matter of fact, trials from Arizona to the Carolinas, as well as Hanna's observations from various plantings, show that TifGrand will perform well

under partial shade all day or heavy shade for much of the day, as well as in full sun. Hanna touts it as a grass that could be a boon to turfgrass managers on golf courses with a lot of trees and in sports stadiums with retractable roofs, though some of that hasn't been proven as yet. However, its biggest use could be much more plebeian.

"I think one of the biggest markets for this grass will be home lawns," says Hanna, University of Georgia professor and plant breeder at the Tifton campus. That's because one of the

drawbacks to the use of bermudagrass in residential and commercial situations is that there are often trees or buildings blocking the sun for much of the day. The same applies to parks and recreation uses, where lawns often extend right up to the tree lines, and then die a slow death in the shade.

It's another coup for Hanna, the one-time ag education major from a small town in Texas who surprised himself by going on to get a Ph.D. in plant breeding and working at Texas A&M and the University of Florida before coming to Georgia in 1971. He succeeded longtime Tifton plant breeder Glenn W. Burton, who originated the Tifway hybrid.

"He and I have about 100 man-years [at Georgia] between the two of us," Hanna says. Even as

TifGrand performs well in up to 60 percent shade ... but it will produce a thin lawn in up to 90 percent shade.