

## The Weekly Plant

### 20 April 2021

**Common Names:** Bermuda grass, devil's grass, wiregrass

**Scientific name:** *Cynodon dactylon* and hybrids

**TAV location, 2021:** Along curbs, especially on Carver.

Bermuda grass is a common lawn grass in the southern United States, especially in the desert Southwest. A good lawn grass spreads robustly so it can fill in empty spots quickly. Oh no! An efficient weed spreads robustly so it can fill in empty spots quickly. And thus a lawn grass quickly becomes a pest.



Bermuda grass came to the United States from eastern Africa sometime in the 1700s or 1800s, possibly by accident, possibly on purpose (it is a forage grass). Bermuda grass is a weed of disturbed places. Any area cultivated or constructed by humans, any area that periodically floods, etc. may be invaded. Bermuda grass routinely spreads from lawns into gardens, driveways, and, in Arizona, waterways. It does not, apparently, invade native grasslands and will not invade shady places, such as forests.

Bermuda grass can easily become a pest, its seeds spread by rainwater, its rhizomes and stolons contaminating landscape gravel, even that plant you just bought. It reproduces in three ways:

1. By seed, though some of the modern hybrids are sterile.
2. By rhizomes - underground stems that spread horizontally. These rhizomes can root and send up new stems. They can also be chopped up by any sort of cultivation, each small portion of a rhizome capable of forming a new plant.
3. By stolons - aboveground stems that spread horizontally. These send up new stems and roots along their length (arrows, photo below). If chopped up, each portion is capable of forming a new plant.

Bermuda grass (sometimes called devil's grass by those with gardens) is now flowering in our community. The stems with flowers may be only a few inches high in dry spots, over a foot tall with access to irrigation. Look for several "fingers" of flowers all connected to the stem at the same point (arrow, photo above) and stolons with new leafy stems along their length (photo to right).

I have no direct experience with Bermuda grass so rather than trying to describe ways to control it, I'll send you to those with expertise: [Sunset Magazine](#), [UA Extension, Univ. California](#), and [Organic Growers School](#). There is extensive information about the ecology and botany of this grass at [Bugwood Wiki](#).

