

# CENTIPEDE GRASS



Centipede grass (*Eremochloa ophiuroides*) is a popular choice for lawns, particularly in the southern United States. Known for its low-maintenance characteristics, it exhibits a unique set of features that make it suitable for both residential and commercial landscapes.

Centipede grass boasts a fine-to-medium texture, creating a lush, carpet-like appearance that is both inviting and aesthetically pleasing. In the growing season, its color transitions to a striking shade of light green to yellow-green, a hue that symbolizes a vibrant, healthy lawn. When in full bloom, the turf has a tended look that enhances the overall appearance of any outdoor space. As with most warm grasses, this grass becomes dormant in winter months and turns brown.

## Root System

This grass variety develops a shallow root system that typically penetrates to a depth of 3 to 4 inches. Such a root structure, while not deeply embedded, allows centipede grass to establish itself quickly and thrive in a range of soil types, provided they are **well-draining**. Its growth habit involves horizontal spreading through stolons, which promotes a dense and uniform coverage across the lawn when properly cared for.

## Erosion Control

Centipede grass is not the first choice for erosion control. Its shallow root zone system cannot hold back heavy rains in poor drainage soils.

Thatch can be problematic for centipede grass in several areas, including water and nutrient intake, erosion control, and disease susceptibility. Thatch creates an already shallow root zone that becomes even shallower, dramatically reducing any erosion control. Not removing thatch by either old-fashioned raking or using a de-thatcher decreases the amount of water the grass can absorb, as well as the effectiveness of fertilizers. Thatch also creates an environment conducive to diseases and fungi.

## Drought Resistance

One of the standout characteristics of centipede grass is its remarkable drought resistance. Once established, this grass requires less water than many other turf varieties, making it a sustainable option for regions with limited rainfall. Its ability to enter a dormant state under extreme dry conditions allows homeowners to conserve water while still maintaining an attractive lawn.

**Beware:** Because centipede grass is thought to be tough and hardy, regular care, including watering, mowing, thatch removal, and fertilization, is necessary.

## Watering

Although centipede grass is drought-tolerant, it thrives with regular watering, especially during the establishment phase. A consistent watering schedule of approximately 1 to 1.5 inches per week ensures that the grass remains healthy and green. The best practice is to water deeply and infrequently, encouraging deep root growth and resilience.

## Fertilizing

This grass is notoriously low in its nutrient requirements, which simplifies maintenance for the homeowner. A light application of fertilizer, explicitly formulated for centipede grass, applied once in the spring, is often sufficient to meet its nutritional needs. Excessive fertilization can lead to lush growth that may require more frequent mowing and can increase susceptibility to pests and diseases. Due to the shallow root zone system, using a pre-emergent for weeds should be considered.

## Mowing

Centipede grass adapts well to regular mowing. It is best to maintain a cutting height of around 1 to 2.5 inches, which creates an optimal balance between aesthetic appeal and healthy growth. Frequent mowing encourages the grass to thicken and promotes a lush lawn texture, while also decreasing the amount of weeds in the grass.

## Disease Resistance

In terms of disease resistance, centipede grass has a fairly robust profile. It tends to be resistant to common turf diseases such as brown patch and dollar spot. However, it is susceptible to nematodes and may occasionally experience symptoms related to environmental stressors, particularly during extreme weather conditions. Maintaining proper cultural practices and regular lawn care can mitigate most risks associated with disease.

## SUMMARY

Centipede grass, while a popular option for some homeowners, is not the optimal choice for erosion control. Its shallow root system makes it less effective in stabilizing soil compared to other grasses. Additionally, in hot and humid climates, centipede grass is more prone to various diseases, which can undermine its health and vitality. Therefore, for effective erosion management and resilience against climate challenges, it is advisable to consider more robust alternatives that provide better soil anchoring and disease resistance.

