

Exceeding a Homeowner's Expectations



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Low Country landscape pro delivers a golf course caliber lawn



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Photos courtesy of Guy Fiore.

When Gary Fiore and his wife Sherry built a house in the upscale golf course community of Berkeley Hall in Bluffton, S.C., Fiore knew he wanted his lawn to be something special. With the mild weather of the Low Country, Fiore realized he, his wife and their 160-pound Mastif, Sergio, would spend a lot of time outdoors at their new riverfront property.

"I wanted something that looked like a golf course," Fiore said. A friend who also lives in Berkeley Hall had recently installed a fine-bladed zoysiagrass as his home lawn, and Fiore said there was no question that he wanted the same grass for his house, too. "His lawn was spectacular. It looks like a green on a very nice golf course," said Fiore.

Fiore contacted Donald Ward, owner of Earthscapes Unlimited, whose company maintains a number of home lawns in Berkeley Hall. Ward spent 20 years in the landscape and turf business before launching his business in South Carolina 14 years ago.

Earthscapes Unlimited has five employees. The company offers start-to-finish landscape design, planning, installation and maintenance. Ward said he works with trusted subcontractors for his irrigation and design work. His company can do everything from grading a site to installing sod and ornamentals. He has licensed pesticide applicators on staff as well as a licensed arborist.

Ward installed Zeon Zoysia at Fiore's home two years ago. He applied fertilizer and then he laid out the zoysiagrass sod. In the growing season,

the grass is mowed twice a week at less than half an inch. In the fall and winter, Ward said he lets the grass grow taller for more leaf blade to soak up the sunlight of the shorter days.



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Guy Fiore, pictured, and his wife Sherry wanted their lawn to be something special. They got just that thanks to landscape pro Donald Ward, who installed Zeon zoysiagrass.

"I've had people come here and ask me if the grass was real, that's how nice it is," Fiore said. "It's like a carpet."

A different experience

During Ward's 14 years as a professional landscaper, he's planted and maintained zoysiagrass, St. Augustinegrass and centipedegrass. But this particular cultivar of zoysia, Zeon Zoysia, Ward said, is different than any other grass he's managed.

"It looks good all year," Ward said. "From a scale of one to 10, it's a 10 – winter, spring, summer and fall."

A friend and mentor, Steve Keller, who was the superintendent who grew-in the golf course at Berkeley Hall, informed him of this particular variety. Keller now works at a golf course in Florida.

"He said I had to try it, so I got a hold of Bill Nimmer at Nimmer Turf Farms here in South Carolina. I said I wanted to get aggressive with it and he said that I could," said Ward.

Nimmer Turf Farm is a licensed sod producer of Zeon Zoysia in Ridgeland, S.C. All of the zoysiagrass produced in South Carolina requires certification by the Crop Improvement Association Certification Program at the Clemson University Department of Plant Industry.



Nimmer said although Ward maintains Fiore's lawn at Berkeley Hall to a highly manicured standard, the grass also looks good with less rigorous management. Nimmer knows this not only as the sod producer, but as a homeowner. He has the same grass at his home lawn.

"I replaced my old St. Augustine lawn with Zeon. Doni Ward maintains it with a regular rotary mower at about 2 inches and it looks fabulous. The versatility is what I love about the grass," Nimmer said.

An environmental choice

Bladerunner Farms in Poteet, Texas, the world's largest privately owned zoysiagrass research and development facility, developed the variety and

touts its environmental qualities. In general, the grass requires less water and less fertilizer to stay healthy.

Ward can attest to the drought tolerance of the grass. "If you're in a drought and you can't water, zoysia will hold up better than St. Augustine or Centipedegrass for sure. If we can put water on it once a week on water restrictions, zoysia will hold up better than any other grass."

The grass also stands up to shade issues. "I put Zeon Zoysia in a yard that gets 1.5 hours of sunlight a day and it looks beautiful," continued Ward. "You need sunlight for anything to grow, but it's doing very well. I had three other grasses in that yard before and they all failed. I'd tried St. Augustine, centipede and paspalum," said Ward.

The grass also does well against pests, disease and other maintenance pressures.

"I used to take care of another zoysia variety and it got a lot of thatch. Bill Nimmer said Zeon doesn't create a lot of thatch and I've found that to be true," Ward said. "Compared to other grasses, you don't get as much fungus on Zeon, you don't get dollar spot, you don't get chinch bugs, which are all common problems on other grasses."



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Nimmer Turf Farm supplied the fresh zoysiagrass sod to green the Fiore property in Bluffton, S.C.

In the autumn, Ward said the zoysia is the last grass of all the home lawns to go dormant, holding its color longer than other turf. When it finally does turn, it turns a golden brown color. Ward said many of his clients like the color change.

"It's beautiful when it goes brown." But for those clients who want a green lawn all year long, Ward paints the grass using a special turf paint.

"I've painted a couple of yards green when it was going dormant and it's the nicest grass out there you can paint green. The leaves are easier to paint," he said. He added that the zoysia is the only grass he now plants.

Fiore echoed Ward's words. "This is the only grass I can picture here. I couldn't picture any other type of grass. It just wouldn't work," Fiore said.

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