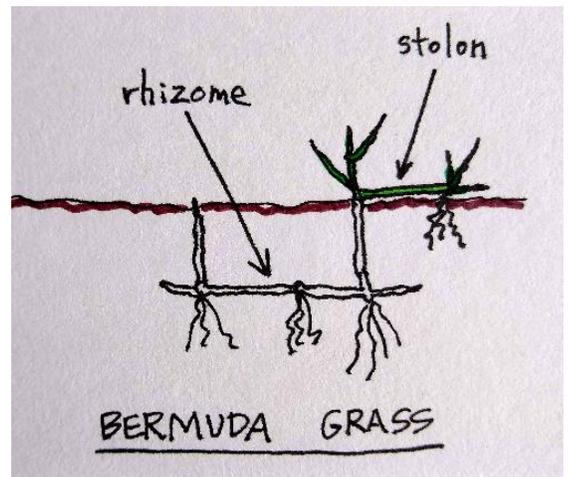


Killing Bermuda Grass

By Paul Barth

Bermuda grass with its fast growing and extensive root system is a terror in your garden, and it is important to act fast, aggressively and persistently to get rid of it. I have fought it for years and now I'm starting to win, here is what I have learned.

If the Bermuda is all in one area and there are no plants in that area you want to save, such as only a lawn, then try solarizing it to death. You will be baking it with the sun for at least a month during the warmer months of the year. *(Photo courtesy: Removing Bermuda grass - Greg Alder's Yard Posts: Southern California food gardening)*



Start by covering the area with a clear plastic tarp, one big sheet works best. Try to bury the edges of the plastic with soil, or seal them down tightly with rocks or bricks. In a few days you will see water drops inside the tarp and that means it is getting hot in there. The plants inside will start to die but it will take at least a month for the roots to die, that happens once the green shoots on top stop sending them energy.

If Bermuda grass starts to send out runners from under the plastic spray them with concentrated vinegar, numerous times; see info on that below.

Another method is to smother it with cardboard and mulch. First, you spray the Bermuda grass with vinegar (see below) and wait a few days for it to start to turn brown; if some areas are still green spray them again. Once most of it is dead rake up the dead grass, cutting the shoots off if necessary. Wait a few days and then lightly water the area. In a few days more Bermuda shoots will emerge and you will again spray them with strong concentrated vinegar.

This process is weakening the root system, so they won't spread so darn fast, as little energy is being sent to them with the tops mostly dead. You can do the raking and watering step again, or you can start smothering them now.

The first step is to cover the area with at least two layers of thick cardboard. If you only have the very thin cardboard use 3 layers (or more). Try to remove all the plastic tape before you start. Spread the cardboard at least 2 feet beyond the edge of the Bermuda grass, and then cover all of it with at least 6 inches of mulch. It may work with 4 inches of mulch, however more is better and 10 to 12 inches is even better. Wood chips work great since they are heavy and hold the cardboard in place. Other forms of mulch, such as straw, fine ground up wood or other dead organic material will work if thick enough.

If Bermuda grass shoots work their way up through the mulch or out along the edges, spray them with concentrated vinegar; persistently until they are dead. When you think the Bermuda grass is dead you can pull the mulch back and cut holes in the cardboard, to put

plants back in those areas. The mulch will keep the soil moist and help your new plants thrive.

Most of the time the Bermuda grass is growing up and through your other plants, where it is harder to kill. You want to attack it sooner rather than later and be very persistent until it stops coming back. You will need to spray it with concentrated vinegar, many times, and without giving it time to put out long shoots.

By continually killing the green shoots above ground, you are starving the root system, and slowing down its ability to spread and infest other areas. Eventually it will die, however you have to spray any new green shoots every few days, before they have time to feed the root system. This is where most folks mess up as they forget to check it for a week or two, and when they finally look the Bermuda shoots are over a foot long and growing everywhere. Persistence will eventually kill it; with the green shoots always dead and dying the roots will eventually die off too.

The concentrated vinegar spray will not kill or harm other plants unless you really soak them in the spray many times. You need to focus on the Bermuda grass and spray it over and over. If you think a plant is delicate you can hold a piece of cardboard between it and the Bermuda grass when you spray. I have used this method to kill Bermuda grass growing between irises, roses, CA native plants even some vegetables and they have all survived. The other plants have tougher leaves and far more of them, so getting a little vinegar on part of them has never been a problem.

Also, you are not spraying enough to have an effect on the soil as most of it is going on the plants and the small amount that hits the ground won't cause any damage. I have used this method for a number of years and all the other plants are doing fine. If you actually poured the concentrated full strength vinegar in one area it might be an issue, other than that you and the soil will be just fine.

The concentrated vinegar I use is at least 30% acid and it can be purchased in the cleaning section of Home Depot. It is not inexpensive at around \$20 a gallon but worth it to get rid of Bermuda grass. I use a small spray bottle to apply it, when it is growing in and through other plants.

Mix it in the gallon jug or another container with at least a quarter cup of fine salt per gallon and about a quarter teaspoon of dish soap. The soap breaks the surface tension on the plant and allows more to soak in. It will work without the soap and salt, but works better with it.

If you search online you will find many formulas for using strong vinegar to kill weeds. Most of them use a lower strength vinegar and far more salt. I tend to shy away from using lots of salt as it may cause more harm than the vinegar once in the soil. A friend who uses the formula with more salt has not had any problems as our winter rains probably wash it away. I suggest experimenting to find what works best for you.

The key to making this work is follow-through and persistence. Don't give the Bermuda grass a chance to grow more than an inch after the first spraying. Keep at it for a month and it

usually kills the Bermuda grass. This also works on other weeds such as Spurge, and usually kills it with just one coating. It will also kill Bind weed, however it generally takes 2 or 3 sprayings to terminate it.

Happy gardening.