

Warm season grass 101 – transitioning your lawn to warm season grass

Warm season grass is known for its hard wearing, thick and drought tolerant nature – and it requires much less water (once established) than other types of grass to stay looking great.

Established warm season grass is also well suited to Melbourne’s harsh summer weather, as sporadic summer rainfall is usually sufficient to successfully maintain these grasses, with some types actually becoming greener in colour as the temperature increases.

But before transitioning to warm season grass, you may need to think about the following factors.

Identify the environmental conditions

Is the area in full sun, shaded or a bit of both? Are there trees, bushes or a plan for a pergola that will affect the amount of shade in the future?

All warm season grass types require a minimum amount of sunlight per day; however some varieties will tolerate shade better than others.

What are your requirements - how do you plan to use the lawn area?

Do you want a pretty, green lawn to look at, but rarely venture on to? Or do you need sturdy turf capable of handling high traffic such as parked vehicles, children playing sport and pets? If so, then you need a tougher, more vigorous type of lawn that can handle high traffic and quickly repair itself. This type, however, will need to be mowed more often and requires more maintenance.

Our comparison chart sets out the key characteristics for the three leading species of warm season grass suited to Melbourne.

Characteristics of warm season grass in Melbourne

	Water Efficiency	Drought Tolerance	Heat Tolerance	Shade Tolerance	Colour Retention	Wear Tolerance	Fertiliser Efficiency	Salt Tolerance	Frost Tolerance
Couch	High	Excellent	High	Low	Medium	Excellent	Excellent	High	Low
Kikuyu	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Medium	Medium	Excellent	Medium	High	Low
Buffalo*	High	Excellent	High	Excellent	High	Medium	Medium	High	High

*Please note that Buffalo grass cannot be grown from seed – it is only available as instant turf or ‘runners’.



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Know your grass

Couch

Ideal for an active family or dog traffic, Couch is one of the most popular grasses in Australia today and is very quick to recover from any wear or damage. It is extremely drought tolerant and requires minimal maintenance but has low tolerance to shade (which may result in patchy growth) if planted incorrectly.

Kikuyu

The toughest and most durable, Kikuyu thrives on sun and heat, and is very drought tolerant – while tolerating small amounts of shade. Well suited to areas subject to car and dog traffic it is known for its extremely vigorous growth and it will require regular maintenance. Without regular mowing (and if positioned in a low traffic, or otherwise unsuitable area) it is likely to encroach into garden beds or other areas.

Buffalo

Buffalo thrives on hot temperatures and can survive for long periods without water once established. It is shade tolerant and is able to withstand some wear and tear, but it is a surface runner, so may need an edging barrier and maintenance to keep it out of garden beds. It is low maintenance, requiring minimal fertilising and mowing while still providing a green lawn through summer months.

It is important to note that Buffalo cannot be grown from seed, so if this variety is of interest to you, you will need to investigate the costs of pre-grown grass installation.

Zoysia – Difficult to grow across most of Melbourne

You may have heard of Zoysia, a slow growing lush green grass variety known for being less invasive. It's important to note that Zoysia needs the warmest of Melbourne conditions in order to grow well. For this reason it is generally not recommended for Melbourne gardens, as it is much better suited to weather typically experienced in northern Australia.

