Is Meyer Zoysia for Iowa?

Meyer Zoysia is a warm-season grass. The lawn grasses commonly used and recommended in lowa are cool-season grasses. The final answer, however, depends upon what you want in a lawn grass as to care, appearance, etc.

by H. L. Lantz

MEYER ZOYSIA is being widely advertised for use as a lawn grass. Many questions about it have come to Iowa State College and the county extension offices. The most frequently asked questions are variations of: "Is Meyer Zoysia recommended for Iowa?" "Can it be used successfully as a lawn grass here?"

The key to the answers lies mainly in the fact that Meyer Zoysia is a warm-season grass. It does well in the area to the south of Iowa—from the 40° latitude southward. Meyer Zoysia is a selection from common Zoysia japonica and has been released for a special area which doesn't include Iowa. But many of the advertised claims for this grass are based on results obtained in the area for which it was developed.

In general, the evidence we have indicates no particular advantage for Meyer Zoysia in Iowa and that it probably will do no better than, if as well as, grasses already adapted and recommended for the state. It may, on the other hand, have some disadvantages in most of Iowa—depending on what you want in a lawn grass with regard to care, appearance, etc.

What It Is . . .

*Zoysia was introduced into the United States from Japan in 1905. Subsequent research by the United States Golf Association,

H. L. LANTZ is associate professor of horticulture.

the USDA and state experiment stations developed several superior strains. Meyer (then known as Z-52) was selected for further tests in 1940. It was released jointly by USDA and the United States Golf Association in 1951.

Essentially, Zoysia is a warm-season grass, while bluegrass, bentgrass, fescue and other grasses commonly used in Iowa are cool-season grasses. Zoysia makes most of its growth during the summer months, while the cool-season grasses tend to make more growth during the spring and fall. So what? Let's see.

Will Zoysia grow in Iowa? Yes, though it's recognized as a slow grower in climates similar to Iowa's. Properly planted and cared for, it can also "survive" in Iowa, but a good lawn grass must do more than simply survive.

Does it stay green all year? No, it does not stay green all year. In fact, it doesn't "green up" as soon as bluegrass in the spring or stay green as late in the fall as bluegrass. From late September or early October through late April or early May in Iowa, the color of Meyer Zoysia is not green. The leaves are dead during the winter months. The color verges on that of straw or pale brown.

Zoysia starts losing its "greenness" with the first light frost. The first killing frost stops growth entirely; it won't green up again during any warm spells following the first frosts as does bluegrass. In central Iowa Zoysia hasn't

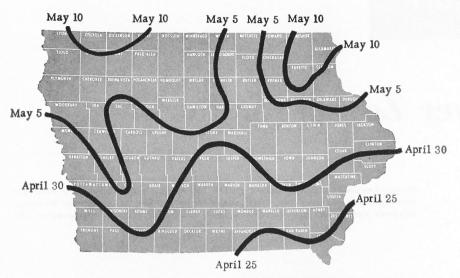
greened up again until warm weather in May.

In our test plots at Ames, Zoysia has frosted off with the first frost of the season. And it hasn't greened up until really warm weather begins. Adjacent bluegrass plots began to green up the third week in March. (In 1956, the Zoysia didn't green up until about June. In the 4 years it has been observed, Zoysia has generally greened up during the latter part of May.)

So while bluegrass may remain green into November or later, Zoysia can be expected to remain green only until the first frosts of late September or early October. Likewise, bluegrass usually starts greening up in March, while Zoysia couldn't be expected to do so until May 15 to 30 depending, of course, on the season.

For more accurate estimates of these dates for your particular location, see the two maps to determine the average dates for the first frost of fall and the last frost of spring.

Will Meyer Zoysia form a thick, dense sod? Yes—eventually and if properly planted, fertilized and cared for. Using the usually recommended method of planting (2- to 2½-inch sprigs or plugs planted about 1 foot apart), evidence indicates that 2 to 5 years are required for Meyer Zoysia to make a solid sod in central Iowa. If watering can be done and if plenty of nitrogen is provided, Zoysia might make a full



AVERAGE DATE LAST 32° F. FREEZE IN SPRING

sod in the second year in this area.

During the spring and summer of 1953, we planted Meyer Zoysia and three other strains of Zoysia in a turf garden at Iowa State College. Planting was done by sprigs. Several plots were sprigged on June 9, the others a week later. All plots were watered to keep the sprigs alive and to aid in growth. After four seasons of growth, only one plot of Meyer is reasonably well filled out though no irrigation was provided during the past three dry summers.

In time, however, it does form a dense, thick and tough sod. Meyer Zoysia has a fine record in areas south of Iowa and in some other areas. Is it drouth hardy or resistant? Once established, Meyer Zoysia is drouth tolerant. So are the other lawn grasses such as bluegrass and the fescues which are commonly recommended and used in Iowa. Most grasses brown during lengthy dry periods. But they green up and grow again when it rains or when you use the lawn sprinkler. Zoysia plots did go off color during the dry weather this past summer.

How much moving? Meyer Zoysia seems to have a backhanded advantage in Iowa when it comes to moving. When it grows, it, needs about the same amount of moving as other lawn grasses in Iowa. For best results it should be moved ½ inch in height. But it doesn't need mov-

ing as early or as late in the year as other lawn grasses. Whether this is an advantage or disadvantage for you depends on whether or not you want a green lawn earlier or later in the year than seems possible with Meyer Zoysia.

What about other care? Meyer Zoysia seems to require relatively more care in getting started in Iowa than other lawn grasses. Once established, care (including fertilization) is about the same, though timing would vary with the shorter growing season of Zoysia.

Is Meyer Zoysia good on poor soil? If the "poor soil" is properly fertilized, Zoysia will grow on it—as well as other lawn grasses. Zoysia will not, however, do well in shaded areas nor on north slopes.

Other differences? The leaves of Zoysia are completely dead—not dormant—during the winter. When growth does start in the spring, it starts at the ground level and must work its way up through the previous year's dead growth.

The other major difference between Meyer Zoysia and other lawn grasses now recommended and commonly used in Iowa is that Zoysia must be started from sprigs or plugs rather than from seed, and no seed is available.

Try It?

If, after considering the pros and cons, you want to try Zoysia for lawn use, we suggest getting a small quantity for trial to see if it's suited to your location. Remember it must be started from sprigs or plugs rather than from seed. Follow the directions furnished with the sprigs or plugs or the common method outlined above.

We do not, however, recommend Meyer or the other Zoysias for general lawn use in Iowa. If your interest is in really improving your lawn, we suggest using grasses and practices already recommended, including proper fertilization. We plan to have an article on general lawn care—varieties, seed, fertilizer, etc.—in a late winter or early spring issue.

