

TifTuf Bermudagrass's Growth Impresses Licensees



TifTuf inventors Brian Schwartz and Wayne Hanna. Image courtesy University of Georgia.

TifTuf bermudagrass was developed by the University of Georgia to resist drought and reduce water consumption, requiring 38% less water than the leading bermudagrass cultivar used globally. As a result, the 55 licensed U.S. TifTuf producers are realizing water savings in their own production fields and can today educate their customers on the cultivar's potential benefit.

“*TifTuf's vigorous, dense growth allows it to tolerate high foot traffic. This vigorous growth also helps licensed producers increase sod production. TifTuf can grow so rapidly that, even after sod is removed for sale, the turfgrass grows back quickly enough to generate more revenue during the same growing season.*”

But TifTuf certainly did not “grow” overnight. After being evaluated for 22 years at the University of Georgia Tifton campus—the worldwide leader in warm-season bermudagrass breeding for nearly 90 years—TifTuf is now installed in golf courses, major sporting arenas and other venues around the globe, like the Sydney Opera House in Australia.

TifTuf, (variety name DT-1), was one of 27,700 inter-specific hybrid bermudagrass progeny that Georgia's Dr. Wayne Hanna began evaluating in 1993. By 1994, 421 hybrids were identified for further evaluation. In 1999, the best 90 hybrid genotypes were then planted underneath a rainout shelter for two years to be evaluated under deficit irrigation.

In 2009, Dr. Brian Schwartz joined the UGA team as a turfgrass breeder. Schwartz continued the research, and eventually TifTuf emerged as the one genotype that best maintained quality and green color under drought stress.

In 2014, TifTuf was co-released by the University of Georgia and the U.S. Department of Agriculture-Agricultural Research Service (USDA-ARS). Their work was supported by USDA-ARS and the university's Cultivar Development Research Program, which redirects UGA licensing revenues back into an internal grant program targeted at plant breeders.

UGA's Innovation Gateway office, on behalf of USDA-ARS, exclusively licensed the U.S. rights in TifTuf bermudagrass to a Georgia company, New Concept Turf, consisting of some of the best and most successful sod producers in the state. The exclusive licensee has sublicensed 55 growers that produce and sell TifTuf from Florida to Maryland, and from Hawaii to South Carolina. Innovation Gateway retained the rights to license TifTuf to international entities, building upon its decades of experience with licensing other "Tif" bermudagrass cultivars to international partners. Currently, Innovation Gateway has TifTuf licensed producers in Australia, Japan, China, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Licensed producers of TifTuf have expressed amazement at its rapid, widespread adoption since its 2014 release.

"Based on my 35 years in the sod industry, the rate of sod farm adoption and integration of TifTuf into production has been unprecedented for a warm season turfgrass of any species," said Ken Morrow of The Turfgrass Group, a member of New Concept Turf. "TifTuf was installed on over 260 million square feet of landscape, sports and golf projects in 2020. Given the pace of 2021 sales, cumulative TifTuf sod installations since its 2014 release will pass 1 billion square feet in early fall 2021."

This story was originally published in 2021.

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