

Kikuyugrass at Ladera Ranch

Kikuyugrass (*Pennisetum clandestinum*) is a low-growing, warm-season grass, native to tropical Africa. It spreads vigorously by both rhizomes and stolons. The stems and leaves are covered with fine hairs.

Kikuyugrass was originally from Kenya and introduced into Southern California from Australia for use as erosion control along ditches and banks. It is adapted to the California coast, from San Diego to San Francisco. It has also been introduced into southeastern portions of the United States, into Texas and along the Gulf Coast. Kikuyugrass tends to thrive where other grasses stress with limited water and nutrients.



At Ladera Ranch, Kikuyugrass exists in most turf areas. Although not planted here intentionally, Kikuyugrass has migrated into Ladera from surrounding communities and grass clippings in passing landscape vehicles. Due to its aggressive and opportunistic nature, efforts to control Kikuyugrass are often futile, as it will simply reestablish itself very quickly.

Much like Bermuda grass, Kikuyugrass builds “thatch”. After mowing, it often looks as if the lawn is dry or brown. This is because the week’s growth of green grass has simply been cut off exposing the thatch below.

On the plus side, Kikuyugrass is drought tolerant, disease resistant and does not need any special fertilizers. Although it can go partially dormant or off-color in the winter, it responds well as the weather warms in the spring.

Several golf courses in Southern California have learned to live with Kikuyugrass (Mission Viejo Country Club pictured to the right) and they now embrace it. These golf courses have found that by adjusting mowing heights and aggressively “dethatching” regularly, the Kikuyugrass can actually become aesthetically pleasing.

