

## HARRY BAXTER'S LAWN

With scissors in hand, Harry Baxter walked to the property line of his neighbor on the left side. Mind you, these aren't ordinary scissors. They are professional grade, heavy duty, comfort grip, stainless steel, tailor's scissors. Kneeling down at the road, he faced the brick border installed on the property line. Making his way down the bricks, he carefully trimmed each runner of Floratam St. Augustinegrass that attempted to cross the boundary into his yard. To be fair, he did the same for any of his Empire Zoysiagrass that attempted to go into his neighbor's yard. The average homeowner might consider this chore a once-a-week deal that's done when they mow the lawn and run the power string-trimmer. Harry was old school, preferring the hand tool that a true artist would employ and attending to the chore on a daily basis.

Another daily chore that occupied Harry's retirement years was "walking the grass". As an ex-Master Chief in the Navy, Harry believed in the importance of inspection. The daily grass inspection involved a careful, methodical grid work pattern. The slightest enemy (weed) who dared to invade Harry's lawn received an immediate death

sentence. Harry dealt with any fire ant brigade that even thought about starting construction in quick order.

Now, Harry was getting on in years and his legs were starting to go, so it forced him to hire out the mowing work. This frustrated him greatly. The boys down at the Ridgeview Bar & Grill would get an earful of lawn mowing blues every time it was mowing day. Not only did he complain about not being able to mow himself anymore, but he complained loudly about the cost of paying someone else to do it. He had to pay money for someone to fertilize, mow the grass, and maintain the sprinkler system so that his Empire would stay healthy and continue to grow bountifully. Then he had to pay more because his healthy grass grew so fast that it required mowing more often. With the Empire Zoysia, it just looked a whole lot better if the clippings were collected, bagged and hauled away. Of course, he complained about having to pay more for that, too. Then he had to pay more fees at the county landfill for the disposal of the clippings.

Yes, the boys at the Ridgeview Bar & Grill sometimes grew tired of Harry's complaining. One of them, anonymously of course, sent Harry a letter offering to sell him some goats. The letter hailed

what the goats could do in reducing mowing costs. It could evolve into a part-time business, even. When winter came around and the need to mow so often waned, the goats could go to market and bring a profit. Then you could bring in a new batch in the spring. As soon as Harry began talking about goats at the Bar & Grill, some of the boys could hardly contain their laughter. When they realized that Harry was serious, though, they began thinking about all the new complaining he might do, and the humor wore thin.

When other lawns in the neighborhood started to look unkempt, you might think Harry would complain to the Homeowners Association about it, but he never did. It only made him more fastidious than ever to keep his yard in perfect condition. The lawn at 324 Oak Street stood like a lighthouse for all to see. One neighbor called it the presidential palace of grass. Should you be walking down the street and see Harry working on his lawn, you might stop, stand at attention, and salute. Another neighbor once remarked that of all the turfgrasses available to plant, Harry chose a Zoysiagrass named Empire.

Be forewarned, though, that should you not be able to contain yourself and you feel compelled

to ask Harry a question about his lawn, you could have a problem. Harry would consider that an opening to talk about all the virtues and maxims regarding grass ownership. You might hear things like:

Turfgrass acts as a natural filter, reducing pollution by purifying the water passing through its root zone.

A well-maintained lawn and landscape can add up to 15% to the value of a house.

Eight healthy front lawns have the cooling effect of 70 tons of air conditioning, enough to cool 16 homes.

2,500 square feet of well-maintained turfgrass will release enough oxygen to meet the needs of a family of four every day.

And so on ...

In the end, if you are an average homeowner, never expect to have a lawn as magnificent as Harry Baxter's. You can't do it, unless you own a professional grade, heavy duty, comfort grip, stainless steel, tailor's scissors and have plenty of time on your hands. Even then, you may not be able to

do it. You can, however, do the best you can do with the grass you've got. A little sweat and plenty of good old common sense will carry you through most issues. If you begin to suffer the summer doldrums and all the challenges that come up that time of year appear overwhelming, go down to 324 Oak Street and just breathe. Then go back to your own yard and deal with it as a renewed turfgrass warrior ready for battle, even if all you have is a St. Augustinegrass. And if that doesn't work, grab a cold glass of lemonade and find a chair under the nearest shade tree.