

# Turfgrass Certification in South Carolina

Department of Plant Industry  
Regulatory & Public Service Programs  
Clemson University

The Southeast has experienced increased demand for high quality turfgrass in recent years, primarily due to the expansion of the golf course industry and the desire for rapid establishment of uniform turf for athletic fields and landscapes. In an effort to assure the quality of turfgrass obtained, contract specifications commonly include the requirement for **Certified** sod or sprigs. Clemson University's Division of Regulatory and Public Service Programs (RPSP) has the responsibility to provide Certification services for turfgrass produced in South Carolina.

However, there is some confusion about just what Certified turf is. Much of this confusion relates to the fact that RPSP conducts two different inspection programs for turfgrasses in South Carolina that use the term, "certification." One is Nursery Certification which is administered by the Department of Plant Industry (DPI), and the other is Seed Certification which is also administered by the Department of Plant Industry.

Nursery Certification involves inspections to assure freedom from injurious plant pests and diseases (example: fire ants) and is a regulatory requirement for businesses selling plant materials. A Nursery Certificate Tag must accompany all shipments of sod or sprigs except for local retail sales to end users. This program is not concerned with the genetic identity or purity of the grass and the Nursery Certificate Tag may **not** be used as evidence of certification to satisfy contract specifications for Certified turf.

Seed Certification is a program of voluntary participation whose purpose is to promote the genetic identity and purity of the turf and freedom from most noxious or objectionable weeds. **Certified** sod and sprigs are produced in accordance with South Carolina's Vegetatively Propagated Turfgrass Standards and have been frequently inspected by DPI staff to ensure compliance with the standards. A **South Carolina Certified Grass** certificate showing such information as variety name, lot number, field identification and quantity of grass must be signed by the producer and accompany each shipment of Certified grass. This certificate is what differentiates Certified turf in the market place!!

It should be noted that it is unlawful in South Carolina to represent reproductive material as Certified unless it has been inspected, approved and labeled in accordance with the SC Seed Certification Standards. The use of Nursery Certificate Tags to imply Certification is a violation of SC law, as is shipment without the South Carolina Certified Grass certificate.

The staff of DPI stand ready to assist producers with any complaints regarding SC Certified grass that is properly labeled. If there are any questions about Clemson's Turfgrass Certification program, please contact us at:

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