

One of the main criticisms levelled against the majority of modern fine turf swards, especially on golf course turf, is the over prevalence of *Poa Annua*. But why is *Poa Annua* hated by some and tolerated by most?

It is the most common unsown grass species found on British turf surfaces. *Poa Annua* occurs as two major types each having their own characteristic growth form - one species is a very upright growing plant that flowers and sets seed very quickly, under good conditions in less than 60 days, and produces a reservoir of dormant seed. When conditions are right the seeds will germinate and fill any gaps in the turf.

The sub species are *Erecta*, mainly found in arable land and *Reptans* which inhabits golf and bowling greens.

It will withstand close mowing. Golf greens are being continually defoliated and *Poa Annua* will happily exist in these conditions. It grows in almost every type of soil.

It can survive with a shallow root system and exist in sour, wet soil overlying very compacted below surface soil. It will also grow on very compacted ground where other grasses will not grow. *Poa Annua*, or annual meadow grass, is unwanted on a golf course because:-

It is frequently in flower and often has poor colour, especially when under stress, i.e. under drought conditions, nutrient starvation and in winter when frost is about.

It is very susceptible to disease, particularly *Fusarium* patch disease.

It competes strongly with other grasses. As very quick growing grass, striving to flower, seed and germinate, *Poa Annua*, by virtue of its name, will rapidly colonise bare areas cramping the style of the more desirable, but perhaps less aggressive, grass types.

It slows down the playing surface. *Poa Annua*, indeed any grass, will produce an open straggly sward if not kept in check by management practises. Putting green turf grasses are actually existing in the most unnatural state - think of Bonsai. There is no such thing as a miniature oak tree!

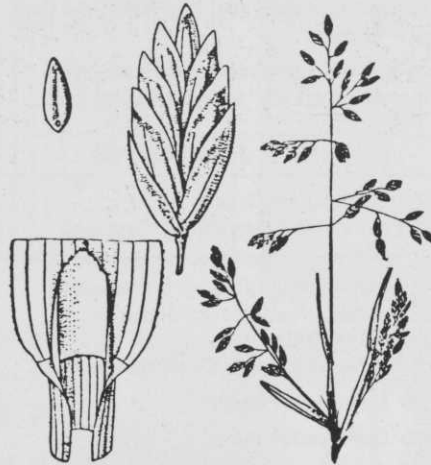
It produces thatch quicker than *festuca* and *agrostis* and requires relatively higher nutrient levels.

Having heard all that, it sounds like commonsense to try to work towards a *Poa Annua* free turf - but this is easier said than done.

Agronomists say you can rid your turf of *Poa Annua* in a couple of seasons by frequent slitting, scarifying and by a minimal watering, but, in my opinion, these people are living in *cloud cuckoo land*. It is a long slow process even if you use only nitrogenous fertilisers and iron, keep your turf on the acid side, aerate and verticut at regular intervals and irrigate very sparingly.

# POA ANNUA

can we live with  
Annual Meadow Grass  
..... asks ALAN GAMBLE  
Pannal's Head Greenkeeper



By ensuring the drainage on your greens is first class will go a long way to controlling *Poa Annua*. This treatment will also encourage the establishment of the *festuca* and *agrostis* grasses that need cultivating to improve the putting surfaces.

My personal opinion, and probably the view of most practising, informed, and intelligent greenkeepers, is that if you don't get your drainage right you will never control *Poa Annua* or irradiate the spongy thatch we hear so much about, spoiling winter play. I am convinced, however, and it will take a great deal of fresh evidence to change my opinion, that bad drainage contributes more to spongy greens

than does *Poa Annua*. It is no good slitting and spiking to let the water through the top 6" of soil if the water continues to lie below the surface instead of draining completely away. I believe that if all the *Poa Annua* were to die overnight on British golf courses there would be hundreds of golf greens without much grass cover and there would be many conscientious greenkeepers looking for work, for the simple reason they would not be able to provide a decent putting surface.

The climatic and soil conditions are such that greenkeepers would find it very difficult to get a good cover of *festuca* and *agrostis* from over seeding in most parts of the British Isles.

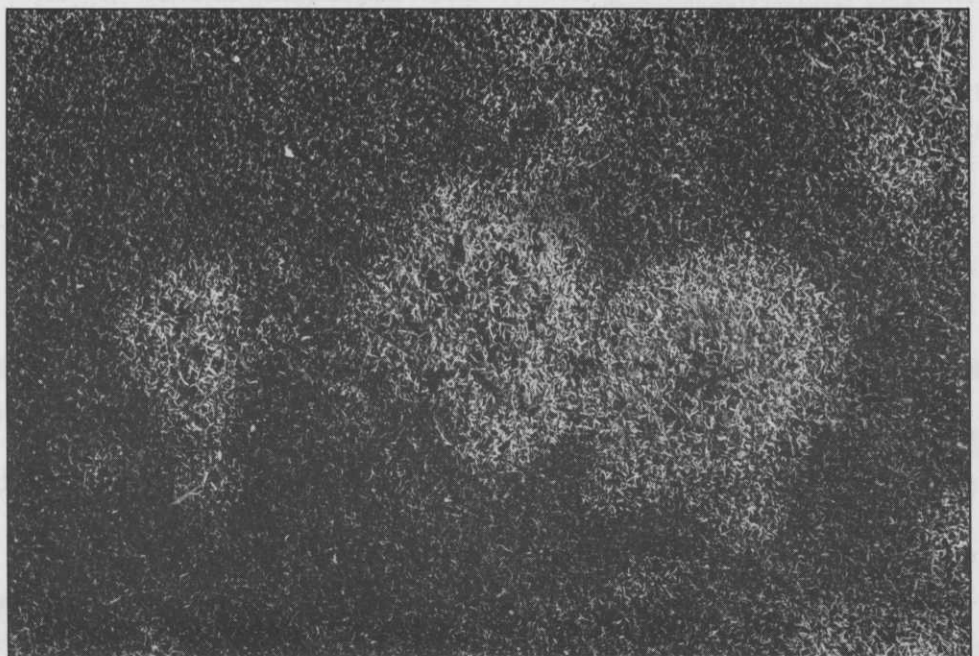
I stated earlier that it was advantageous to use only nitrogenous fertilisers, the reason being that research workers have found that the continued use of phosphate contributes to rapid seed production and *festuca* will thrive quite happily on a low potash count.

Golf club management, should judge their greens on performance and not on colour. All greenkeepers have been told at some time that their greens are putting well when they are lush and look well in bright emerald green but, when the colour goes, even when the surface is first class, the golfers say the greens are not as good as they were two weeks previous.

It is very easy for a greenkeeper to take the easy option with a liberal dose of fertiliser and water when the Committee are complaining, but he probably would not have a decent green for them to play on after 4 or 5 years.

There is far more to making a golf course a place people can enjoy, than waging a constant war on *Poa Annua*.

By controlling thatch and keeping greens well aerated, you can have good greens despite a small percentage of *Poa Annua* but what is more important - you will provide a good putting surface and give a great deal of pleasure to a large number of golfers, who after all are the paying customers.



Annual Meadow Grass is susceptible to *Fusarium* Patch Disease