Sowing the seeds

Jayne Leyland recently joined Rigby Taylor as Seed Research and Development Manager. Jim Cook took the opportunity to be the first to throw a few questions her way.

What attracted you to Rigby Taylor?

It is a very exciting opportunity to be involved with since joining Rigby Taylor.

What will the trials involve?

The trials will be sowing out grasses and then treating them with identified management programmes and products to find solutions to whatever the constraints of that site or maintenance regime is. Each trial will be different according to the location.

Where is the first trial you will be involved with since joining Rigby Taylor?

It will be at Furness Golf Club, in Cumbria, and is an environmental stress trial. This is the first sowing of this particular programme.

How are new seeds bred?

Mainly through crossings of existing cultivars with new grasses which are gathered in the wild by the plant breeders. These are then cross-bred to search for the best characteristics.

You start off with maybe 15,000 of the new variety. This process takes between 12 and 15 years. You’re always looking forward to improve in terms of characteristics.

What makes a good quality grass seed?

Several things. The characteristics of individual cultivars, the synergy of the mixture, the quality of purity and germination of seed mixture and most importantly the constraints of individual cultivars, the synergy of the mixture, the quality of purity and germination of seed mixture and most importantly the constraint of that site or maintenance regime.

What should a greenkeeper think about when buying grass seed?

They should think about individual characteristics that they might require, for example specific disease tolerance or cold weather or drought tolerance. What is as important as individual cultivar characteristics is actually how the seed mixture has been formulated and put together, so there isn’t too much competition between the cultivars in there and one doesn’t dominate the other.

Is there a correct way to store grass seed?

It should be stored in a cool, dry place and also in a secure container to avoid attack from vermin.

What is the future with regards grass seed?

The future is a combination of new cultivars which are coming through breeding programmes with improved characteristics. New sub-species or species which have got significantly different characteristics from cultivars within that same species. Also adaptations of species with unique characteristics, for example, temperature tolerance or creeping growth habit. It’s a combination of the breeding programmes producing the right material and then the good work of greenkeepers being able to have the product in their armoury to get the maximum out of it.

What will the trials involve?

On 5 April a Temporary Use Ban (Hosepipe Ban) came into force in parts of the country covered by seven water companies in the south of England and East Anglia. When two and a half times the normal amount of rain fell in April and frequent showers continued throughout May, many were left wondering why we are still in a drought.

After the driest two years since records began, groundwater, which feeds the levels of rivers throughout the year and is our most important source of water, remains exceptionally low.

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The soil is also extremely important. Where is the first trial you will be involved with since joining Rigby Taylor?

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