SUSTAINABILITY

3. Not all bents are the same – they will respond to different conditions through the year. Different species have different requirements for feed.

For example, Creeping bents need plenty. Colonial about half and Véret about half as much as Colonial, and some are more water dependant than others. Creeping bent really doesn’t like the winter or being allowed to get too long or too hungry, whilst Colonial and Véret do well all year round but their feed and verticutting requirements were quite different.

4. How you make introductions with seed is as important – get it wrong and there’ll be trouble with seed is as important – get it wrong and there’ll be trouble.

Late spring, summer and a very early autumn are best in my opinion. There are plenty of ways to overseed but the crucial part is to get the seed to soil contact and this requires seed sowing and/or scarification at the very least.

Some greenkeepers have had good results with overseeding with deep scarifying when the surface is really opened up. Some of those greenkeepers have also seen that grass disappear later under a tide of Poa due to failures with rest of the maintenance programme.

You might think it’s a bit odd to leave this until last, but I really wanted to make the point that the other issues are essential in getting to this point not vice-versa.

Choosing the right species is the first step in relation to your other maintenance parameters, then you need to look closer at the cultivars. This may or may not mean choosing from the top listed varieties – a suitably qualified agronomist can help you in this area.

Also look at company trial sites to see what’s new - the BSPB Turfgrass Seed Book is a useful source of information.

Sustainability means using less chemicals, and seeking to ensure the course can run effectively under its own steam. Whilst fescue has its well deserved place in maritime and colder climates in the UK and Ireland (and during winter or dry conditions) bent grasses offer a very good, and in many circumstances, better route, towards sustainable playing surfaces.

Bents require a considered and careful approach, looking at each of the management factors listed previously to get the best from them.

Remember there is no point in seeding into acidic, wet thatch accumulation so it is essential to get the scene set before undertaking seeding.

If you’re tempted to start a bent grass renovation programme then DLF Trifolium’s Derek Smith says “the new Arrowtown bent is worth a consideration. It fits into the existing Johnsmann Sports Seed line up of bent grasses which include Manor, Villa 1 and Cobra Nova, the latter being the highest rated creeping bent grass for UK conditions”.

Greenkeepers can take a first look at the official independent quality trial results with the publication of the 2013 Turfgrass seed booklet, but it’s believed that in the first year seed availability is likely to be limited.

Derek adds “Arrowtown is bred from exceptionally fine and dense plants collected from greens at Arrowtown Golf Club and in trials, it really stood out being noticeably much denser than the cultivars currently available, like Manor, Barking and Aberroyal.

Arrowtown is an exceptionally fine and dense brown top, ideally suited to closely mown (4mm) greens, tees and fairways.

On greens the tight, dense surface sets new standards for quality & disease tolerance. It has a natural vigour to recover quickly from renovation and an improved drought stress to retain its green colour for longer in summer.”