

# Winterseeding...

*Each superintendent has his own technique for keeping his greens true, his turf green, and his resume short!*

BY TOM BENEFIELD, CGCS

**W**e have chosen the topic of overseeding as our editorial focus for this issue. It is prudent to select this subject inasmuch as all of our golf clubs wrestle each year with this issue.

Do we overseed or do we not? Having the luxury of living and working in a subtropical climate, we find that not everyone will take part in this annual ritual of spicing up their greens with these northern grasses. Yet at the same time we find that a large majority will take the

plunge out of necessity to protect the turf and their jobs.

Perhaps the number-one reason most golf clubs do overseed is for the practical, obvious reason of having good turf for their golfers to play on during the possible chill of winter. Being that this is the

busiest time of year in our wonderful state, it is prudent to insure that the greens are colorful and playable while the masses are in town.

The next most important reason is marketing. It is a time-honored tradition that green grass sells real estate like nothing else can. Hence every golf course which is driven by real estate sales (which is nearly every golf course built these days) will seed everything it has. For these people it means survival and the extra money is an excellent investment.

What we have done for this issue is to reach out to the rank and file superintendents across the state to get their programs to let them tell you in their own words how and why they do what they do.

**A Change of Pace**

In the past I have overseeded with 80% Gator ryegrass and Sabre *poa trivi-*

*alis* with excellent results.

However, I was looking for an alternative to the disruptive overseeding procedures at the start of our golf season. Researching alternatives via fellow superintendents and various seed suppliers, I decided to give 40% Cobra creeping bentgrass and 60% Sabre *poa trivialis* a try. Last year this proved to be an excellent blend providing truer and faster putting surfaces while not creating as much stress at or slightly below 1/8 inch height of cut. This blend also held up well to the heavy play during the season (45,000 mostly in-season rounds last year).

Our preparations at The Venice Golf and Country Club consisted of verticutting and applying a preplant fertilizer one week prior and topdressing four days prior to overseeding.

Following this, we allowed the greens to grow for two days so the seed would have a place to settle in case of rain.

October 27th we applied two pounds of bentgrass and three pounds of *poa trivialis* per 1,000 square feet. Three weeks later we applied a second application of seed to complete our overseeding.

Each time following seed application, we syringed for about five days. After this period the moisture level during the day was adequate with only an early-morning syringe ahead of the mowers. Mowing was delayed for two days after seeding and then without baskets for another week at 5/32-inch. We lowered our height of cut to 1/8 inch three weeks after the second seed application.

Our maintenance program consisted of 1/2 pound of nitrogen every other week, groomers twice a week (after establishment), spiking once a week and a light topdressing every three-four weeks. Insecticide and fungicide applications were made if "favorable conditions" existed.

This year I will seed a little earlier to



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**So instead of trying to talk them into overseeding, I accepted the challenge of that first year to go through the winter without the protection of seed on the greens.**

allow for slightly earlier coverage (mid-December last year).

Our membership was completely satisfied with our overseeded greens last year and it seemed to require less work than in the past.

*Troy Smith, Golf Course Superintendent  
The Venice Golf and Country Club  
Venice/Suncoast Chapter*

#### Why we don't overseed

What makes being a golf course superintendent so interesting is that each course is unique and the members, owners, or players all have their own ideas of what they would like their golf course to look like and how it should play to make the game more pleasurable for them.

When I first came to the Bradenton Country Club the greens committee chairman told me that they did not overseed their greens and the membership wanted it to stay that way. I had come from a course that overseeded every year and as far as I knew everyone else in our area at that time overseeded as well.

This for me was a new challenge.

When I asked why the members didn't want the greens overseeded, their first answer was the puttability of the greens. In those days common rye was the seed of

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**We put the *poa trivialis* down with a walking rotary spreader and let Mother Nature dictate whether the Tifdwarf bermudagrass or *poa trivialis* will dominate.**

choice.

Next there was no disruption in their play, no grow-in time, no spring transition.

And finally, there was the cost.

These were the basic reasons I was given and they all were valid in their own way. So instead of trying to talk them into overseeding, I accepted the challenge of that first year to go through the winter without the protection of seed on the greens.

Well, it was one of the warmest winters that we had seen in a long time and everything went really well. But not every year was as good as that one and over the years we have developed a program to get us through those tough winter months.

We begin in September by cutting back on our verticutting program. This allows the turf to develop a thin thatch layer which protects the grass by making it more wear tolerant and helps keep it a little warmer on those cold nights and the grass doesn't spike up as much.

We do continue our light topdressing on a biweekly schedule. Our fertilizing program changes in what material we use. We go from using slow-release nitrogen sources to the quicker, more readily available nitrogens which help give us color and growth.

However what really helps us maintain our color through those cold winter days is green dye. For no matter how well they roll or how quick they are, if your greens do not have that color, the members are not satisfied. The secret is to put color on them, but make it look natural.

What works best for us is applying light amounts of dye and doing it more frequently; that way you can maintain a more constant color. We use one to one and one-half gallons per acre and always apply it while the turf has its own natural

color, of course being a private club and not having members play on those really bad days is a big help. Also, I know not overseeding wouldn't work for everyone, but for us the members are happy.

*Jim Svabek*

*Golf Course Superintendent  
Bradenton Country Club*

**Try not to overseed, but...**

Although the overseeding of greens has proven to be a controversial issue over the years in South Florida, the bottom line to me is that each superintendent must do what is in the best interest for the particular club. At Seminole Golf Club, our main goal is not to overseed the greens each year.

In that Seminole is a Donald Ross-designed seaside links-style golf course, the membership feels the greens should be maintained as natural as possible with only the perennial warmseason Tifdwarf bermudagrass. Donald Ross intended for Seminole to be a bump-and-run, shot-making-type golf course requiring firm approaches that usually are not consistent with overseeded greens.

On the other hand, severe weather the past two winter seasons has convinced us that an alternate plan of "interseeding" *poa trivialis* will be used if needed.

By "interseeding", we put the *poa trivialis* down with a walking rotary spreader and let Mother Nature dictate whether the Tifdwarf bermudagrass or *poa trivialis* will dominate.

We do not perform any preplant maintenance practice or raise the mower height to favor the *poa trivialis*. If the weather is abnormally cool and/or wet, the *poa trivialis* will dominate. Warm and dry weather will favor the more dominant Tifdwarf bermudagrass.

Again, our main goal has been to favor



the Tifdwarf bermudagrass as the dominant putting surface.

We keep *poa trivialis* on hand because of its quick germination, ability to tolerate low mowing heights and, most importantly, its quick transition out in warm weather which allows the Tifdwarf bermudagrass to dominate.

In terms of fertility, due to the fact that we want the Tifdwarf bermudagrass to be healthy and aggressive going into the winter months, we apply a balanced N-to-K fertilizer with intervals based on weather conditions. For example, the frequency will be longer during warm weather and shorter during cooler weather with normal applications of 1 pound N and K per 1,000 square feet.

As you know, fertility has a definite impact on the speed of the greens. For this reason, we are evaluating the greens daily to consider fertility, disease, irrigation, mowing height, topdressing and any other maintenance practice which hopefully will give the members the best greens possible based on weather conditions.

We overseed all our tees during late November/early December with *poa trivialis*. Again, we simply put the *poa trivialis* down with a walking rotary spreader on an as-needed basis to fill in any weak or shaded areas and in particular on all par 3 tees to allow for good turf during the winter months. As warm weather returns, we strongly promote bermuda 419 recovery as the dominant turf on the tees.

Hal Hicks

Golf Course Superintendent  
Seminole Golf Club

### Water is critical

Being in Palm Beach County, we have the option of seeding or not seeding our golf course. However we take the prudent approach and seed both our tees and our greens. On our tees we use a blend of ryegrasses which hold up to the high traffic and on the greens we will use a bentgrass variety.

The first step in our overseeding procedure is to cut back on the nitrogen in our fertilizer program some three - four weeks prior to overseeding. However, during this period we will put out one



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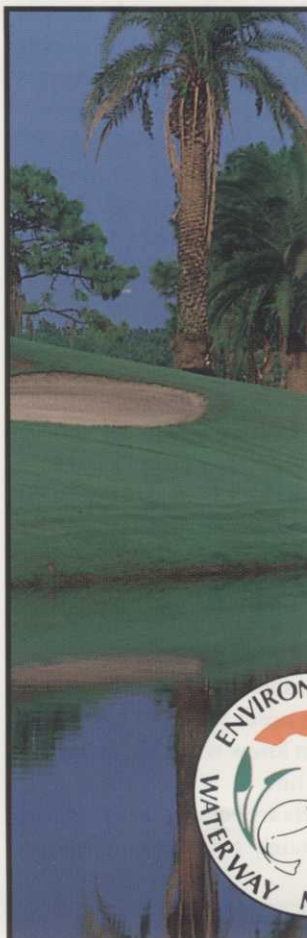
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application of sulfate of potash magnesia in order to raise our potash levels.

Water during this time period is also critical. You don't want to over- or under-irrigate the turf. To over-irrigate will allow the soil to be ripe for diseases, which could hurt the young, tender seedlings when they come up. To under-irrigate will create a soil so dry that the seedlings will have to compete with the base grass for the water applied. Soil moisture is a big key to success.

Days before overseeding we will verticut the greens until we remove approximately 50% of the leaf mass. This will have two effects. It will slow down the aggressive base grass and it will allow the seeds to fall into the mat area where it will be safe from possible washing away by rainfalls.

Before putting down the seed we apply at a curative rate Chipco 26019 for the various leaf diseases which are in the soil and waiting for conditions to get right before exploding. Trust me: with the warm, humid weather and lots of water on the turf, the conditions *will* get right.

Next, we apply a preplant fertilizer of 5-30-20 to assure adequate phosphorus at the rooting zone. Then the big event — applying Penneagle bentgrass seed in two directions at 4.5 pounds per 1,000 square feet. We immediately topdress and carpet drag in the soil to insure good seed-to-soil contact.

At this point we simply baby-sit them. Water them lightly and frequently for the next five days. Once they start popping up we will turn down the water frequency until eventually we are syringing just hot spots.

Remember the old saying, "Put them to bed dry and wash them in the morning" and disease should be of little problem.

*Jerry Redden, CGCS  
Greenview Cove Country Club*

### **Everything but the fairways**

Overseeding time is just around the corner and it seems as if it was just yesterday that the golf course finally had a good and healthy stand of bermudagrass.

At Tampa Palms G&CC, we overseed everything but the fairways. Greens are

overseeded with a poa triv/bentgrass mix, while tees, tee banks and roughs are overseeded with a perennial rye blend. This particular combination has been very successful in providing us with a very desirable putting surface during the winter months.

Golfers like the semidormant fairways that not only are a sharp contrast to the overseeded roughs, but also do not create the so-called "flyer lie."

The overseeded roughs help high traffic areas maintain their playability during the winter and also help to contain the golf ball on the course. Anyone who has played The Palms knows how important that is!

In preparation for overseeding, we make our final application of nitrogen approximately 30 days prior to our overseeding date. Fairways are sprayed with a pre-emergent herbicide to prevent germination of ryegrass in these areas. Also all trap faces are sprayed with a pre-emergent product. This procedure gives us some contrast and it also greatly reduces our labor over the winter months by not having to flymo these areas.

Height of cut in the rough areas is gradually lowered to 1 inch and at this height we can get a good stand of ryegrass to germinate. Roughs are overseeded using a Lely spreader calibrated to 300 pounds of seed to the acre. Tees are done with hand spreaders that are calibrated to 20 pounds per 1,000 square feet. The areas are double verticut and scalped prior to throwing the seed.

Greens are lightly verticut and top-dressed prior to overseeding. The sand on the greens allows the applicators to see where they are going and avoid getting lost. Seeding rates are 4 pounds of bentgrass and 8 pounds of poa triv per 1,000 square feet. After the seed is down, a starter fertilizer is applied and then the greens are watered.

During the germination period, syringe cycles are done throughout the day. Notices are posted informing the golfers as to why this needs to be done. We also try to let them know when the syringing will be going on.

All golf carts are kept on the cart paths for approximately two weeks following

***Golfers like the semidormant fairways that not only are a sharp contrast to the overseeded roughs, but also do not create the 'flyer' lie.***

overseeding. This allows us to syringe as needed without carts damaging the newly overseeded areas.

After the two-week period of all carts staying on the paths and frequent light cycles, the overseed is weaned off the syringing and carts are allowed to return to the playing areas.

Mowing heights are raised and the cutting units are checked daily to ensure that a sharp edge is being maintained. As the overseeding matures, an application of nitrogen is applied to improved color and density. Eventually the turf is mature enough to mow at a lower and more desirable height of cut.

Overseeding is not an easy job, but an essential part of a good turf management program. One must find what works the best in his or her particular region as there are many different methods when it comes to the overseeding process. With a plan of action and a little good luck, your overseeding will be a success.

*Greg A. Plotner, CGCS  
Tampa Palms G&CC*

As you can see, there are many and varied opinions on the present state of overseeding. It also is evident that we as golf course managers are getting more pressure to have great greens year round but especially during the winter. The use of bentgrass and poa trivs are replacing the ryes on the greens surfaces as superintendents try to obtain that superior putting surface his members can be proud of.

One thing is for sure as our members get better educated on the coolseason grasses and what their limitations are, the golfing public is the winner. 