

## We Don't Have a Big Weed Problem!

**Editor's note:** When I called Dave Portz to ask him about his weed control programs, he suggested that I might want to talk to someone else, because he didn't feel he really had a severe problem that would lend itself to an article about problem solving. I didn't let Dave off the hook! I asked him what he did that he felt kept his weed problems to a minimum.

I wasn't boasting when Joel called, but we haven't had a large scale weed infestation of any kind that required a far reaching herbicide program. We do have skirmishes with recurring dollarweed in the St. Augustine turf at the club. We apply light rates of Trimec or Threeway for suppression. We also apply Gallery in the Fall and atrazine in the Spring.

On the course, we do spot spray sedge on the green and tee slopes and some broadleaf weeds in the bare areas on the margins of the roughs. We have not used a preemergent herbicide in five years. We are in environmentally sensitive coastal marsh setting so we try to grow healthy turf to keep weed pressure to a minimum.

In the growing season we verticut greens bi-weekly. The tees are done monthly and the fairways three times each year. We aerify everything twice per year. The GA-60 has done a real good job for us on the fairways.

Our fertilizer program for the bermuda greens is no more than .5 pounds of nitrogen per month. I like to use a 1:2 ratio of nitrogen to potassium with additional straight potassium applications to supplement. Between granular applications, I use light liquid feedings with 12-0-8.

On our overseeding I make one granular nitrogen application of slow release 39-0-0. The rest of the winter I use liquid spray feedings alternating Iron, a root stimulator, and Agriplex without nitrogen every three weeks. I do apply a granular 0-0-28 at .25 - .5 pounds per 1,000 square feet every month.

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## Is the daily demand for tournament conditions driving the entire golf industry into the ground?

BY MIKE BAILEY

There is a growing concern and possible controversy over the integrity of the bermudagrasses being used on our golf courses today. Turfgrasses being sold under old established names are beginning to show a wide disparity in reacting to similar modern maintenance programs. One course's healthy, tight, emerald green putting surfaces are another course's weak and struggling greens. All are built on USGA spec greens and all managed by competent professionals. What's going on? Is someone guilty of wrong doing?

Reflect back to the 1960s and analyze where the game of golf was at that time. Golfer demands and media pressure had not evolved into the pressure of today's demands. What type of hybrid bermudagrasses must have been available then?

The truth is there were not any hybrids in use then. The science of bermudagrass turf research was somewhat simple. Someone had this magical little spot of turf somewhere on his golf course. The "greenskeeper" would cultivate this "jewel plot" as being something better than the rest.

Maybe, he thought, this spot could be the grass of the future. That is exactly how modern bermudagrass evolved. Hence the names of these pocketed areas of the then "grass of the future" typically bore

the name of their geographic location. Ormond bermudagrass, as it became internationally known and planted successfully throughout the world, evolved from the lawn surrounding the Ormond Beach Hotel in Ormond Beach, Fla.

Dr. Glenn Burton, the father of bermudagrass research, and his staff collected samples from these "jewel plots" and took them to the Coastal Agricultural Research Station in Tifton, Georgia for testing. They successfully founded bermudagrass technology that stands even today. Tiftway 419 bermuda was virtually created by Dr. Burton through radiation exposure that altered the original parent plant, and created a genetic change that created the hybrid as it is known today. It took many years of research to select from the many samples created to find a grass that would be considered the most acceptable turf for a golf course.

Dr. Burton has stated, "We did not design these grasses to ever consider they would be mowed so low as to what today's standards are." I distinctly remember attending more than one Tifton Turfgrass Conference the week following the Masters in the 1970s, believing we were pushing our grasses near the edge of survivability at mowing heights of 5/32 of an inch.

Now, many do not consider that ac-

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ceptable. Golfer pressure has demanded heights in the range of 1/8 of an inch, double cutting the greens, and rolling the greens in order to create a stimp meter speed unheard of in the 1970s. We all accepted those few days for that special tournament when you would "shave the greens" down just short of sheer desiccation. However, you usually did not lose your greens or your job because you knew that fine line of flirting with the edge for a short period of time. Now golfers want tournament conditions daily! You can't run the Indy 500 with a Chevy or even a Cadillac. You have to have a custom made race car!

I think the entire golf industry is driving itself into the ground. Some superintendents have planted the first seeds of destruction by actually trying to maintain their greens virtually year round at the edge of disaster. Modern technology allows us to keep the greens artificially alive, but as Dr. Burton, the originator, says, "These grasses just weren't designed to be maintained at these lower heights of cut." That is my first comment to the jury. Maybe you're not guilty of killing the golf course, but you're also not completely innocent. Maybe you're an accomplice!

As leaders of our industry, we must look ahead and say where the bermudagrass industry is going to be in the next five, ten and twenty years. When I got into this profession nearly twenty-five years ago, I never dreamed that our science would be digging our very own graves yet that is how I see the future unless we set up a long range plan now.

In order to effectively move forward, we must review our past. Over twenty years ago, quality bermudagrasses were secured for the golf course, namely Tift-dwarf for the greens and Tifway 419 for the fairways and roughs. If these grasses were acceptable back then, why are they not acceptable now? Quite simply, golfer's expectations have created a demand for a bermudagrass superior to what currently exists. In addition, we are not sure if the grass that we managed yesterday is actually what we're dealing with today. The state of Florida, during the economically stressful 1980s, reduced budgets and totally eliminated the state turfgrass certifi-

cation program.

Because of a cost competitive battle to effectively sell bushels of bermudagrass at the lowest price possible during the Florida building boom, propagators could not effectively certify a grass that the state abandoned. For the past ten years I have sat before more than one board meeting or committee meeting trying to conclude how we, as only superintendents, can convince the government to support us. Fortunately, now that the Florida Golf Economic Impact Survey has been completed, any politician can recognize the impact of golf on the state and the rest of the golfing world.

I see a real need for a council. Not the abandoned and failed Golf Council, but rather a council of superintendents, research specialists and, yes, legislators. People who can support our efforts to create an effective long range research plan to find or create the bermudagrass of the future, along with the economic support to regulate a certification program that will ensure quality for years to come. Idealistically, we are searching for the long range ultimate bermudagrass, or whatever else, that will fulfill the criteria of today's golfer.

With crossbreeding and research that is already completed in other branches of horticulture, we may be looking at the creation of "bentuda." Imagine the fine texture quality of bentgrass being united with the heat hardiness of bermuda. Is it possible? Could it be commercially available by the year 2000?

These type of genetic alterations are not farfetched. We are currently analyzing DNA research identification work for future projects that could prove valuable for long lasting retention of these proposed grasses. DNA identification has hit the fury of the media because of recent trial cases; yet in the world of horticulture, and most specifically, bermudagrass, we are about to explore a whole new world of research. Fingerprinting to identify grasses with unique positive traits will allow researchers to find characteristics that might never have been known about a certain variety.

By DNA identifying the grasses we currently maintain, we could develop an information bank of common denomi-

nators. This information could be pooled for each exact variety. For example, you might have a certain green with isolated mutations that stress out and nearly die during the middle of the summer rainy season. A fellow superintendent, hundreds of miles away or just on the other side of town, has the exact same problem, yet he applies a specific fungicide, making his problem less severe than yours. By sharing this information, you might gain valuable data that will help you endure your situation. As time allows researchers to develop the grass of the future, we could find ourselves going into a dimension that many of us have never dreamed possible.

We have a great deal of opportunity ahead of us. If we just sit here and do nothing, we may all be found guilty of neglect. Whom would you indict? The State for abandoning the certification process? Growers for selling grass that no longer had regulated standards? Clubs and developers buying the cheapest grass they could find? Golfers demanding PGA Tour conditions everyday? Superintendents trying to grow grasses to tolerances never intended? Everyone in the golfing world has a responsibility towards the game's future. The government will not be our financial base for this project. The money must come from the golfer. For too long I've heard there is not enough money available from any of the long list of turfgrass-related associations. I have a problem with this excuse because, ultimately, we work for the golfer. Now, the golfer must come through. There are far too many wealthy golfers out there with the resources immediately available to support the research work required. After all, who gains the most out of this project? The golfer!

Let's start now. Let's organize our current issues. Let's set up a criteria list for this future project and get the scientists working on it now, so we can accomplish our goals. Maybe no one is guilty per se, but we will not be found innocent either if we don't do something soon. Case closed.

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