Quality of vegetative Bermudagrass far exceeds seeded varieties, tests show

The most significant results in the national field tests on Bermudagrasses reportedly concern the seven seeded varieties, which is as many as ranked in the bottom of entrants.

"The quality of seeded types is not near that of vegetative types," said Kevin Morris, national director of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Turfgrass Evaluation Program.

Morris said a lot of researchers are working on new Bermudas and more cultivars will enter the marketplace. "But they probably won't reach the quality of the seeded varieties for at least several years."

Vegetative Bermudas must be sprigged, which is costly, while Bermuda seed grows quickly, Morris said. But the major problem with all of the varieties of the warm-season turf is susceptibility to winter kill in cooler areas.

U.S. Golf Association Green Section National Director Jim Snow said that choosing a Bermudagrass a superintendent "especially has to consider where he is because of (Bermuda's lack of) winter hardiness. Color and texture aren't as important. It's if the grasses survive. And survive is a relative term. It can do with so much damage unless it takes a very long time to come back (from dormancy)."

Mike Kenna, director of Green Section research, said the nationwide tests are helpful but "should only be one part of the decision-making process."

He said there is a wide range in the way the test plots are maintained. "One university may keep it wonderfully, while at the product, the plots are riddled with weeds," he said.

Kenna suggested superintendents check the test results, then talk to the researchers in their region, to develop the tests to see the grass in conditions close to their own.

"That's where the test is valuable too," he said. "If a superintendent bases his decision on the overall mean (of the test alone), he can really mess it up."