Diversity proves to be the root of longevity in many turfgrasses

The ghost of Toronto C15 lives on, ever pushing superintendents to seek a genetically diverse stand of turfgrass, according to Skip Lynch of Seed Research of Oregon.

The tale of Toronto C15, a vegetatively propagated creeping bentgrass, is simple — and devastating. "It dominated the market for a couple of years," said Lynch, Seed Research's marketing director. "Then, suddenly, out of nowhere a disease started eating Toronto everywhere. Greens were going — everything. They called it C15 Diversity proves to be the root of longevity in many turfgrasses

Decline — a bacterial disease that the cure cost more than renovation.

"It turned out the monostand was the absolute monostand. There was no genetic diversity like today's bentgrasses have." Researchers — and superintendents — have learned from the experience. Penncross bentgrass, for instance, is three entirely different plants. Providence is five, Cobra has seven plants in it, Cutter six, Crenshaw five. Those are varieties, but in the strictest sense blends," Lynch said.

A superintendent "planting bluegrass in the rough will specify three different varieties. Why? He's trying to get a genetically diverse stand," he said.

Lynch added that the idea that a superintendent "seeds a stand once and never goes back is a mistake some people make. But they learn the mistake very quickly. You can always, always, always improve a stand — whether it's increasing the population of the stand, or by adding genetic diversity by going out and putting in some new genetic."

— M.L.