Po a triv problems widespread & serious

By MARK LESTIE

Poa trivialis infestations of "epidemic proportions" are being reported in bentgrasses and some Kentucky bluegrasses, affecting golf courses across a broad portion of the United States. The question is, has it always been present?

A rough bluegrass, poa trivialis is "very aggressive," said Terry Buchen, The Legends Group director of agronomy. "It will take over bentgrass. Even when the seed is blue tag-certified, it's getting through [inspections]."

"If you talk to the seed companies, the problem doesn't exist. But if you see new golf courses out in the field, it's absolutely a shame how much poa trivialis is there," said Stan Zontek, director of the U.S. Golf Association Green Section's Mid-Atlantic Region. "It's a huge problem. There are some supers who are fit to be tied."

"I totally disagree with Stan and his statement on new golf courses," said Dr. Rich Hurley, director of research at Lots Seed and perhaps the nation's foremost expert on poa trivialis. "You take me to 120 old courses and I'll find poa triv in fairways, greens and tees. I'm not saying it can't come in the seed, but it's all over. Take anyplace from Georgia north, coast to coast, blindfolded and I'll find it and I'll find it quick."

"It's a hysteria pointed at the seed companies when, if there is a hysteria, it should be: 'This stuff is everywhere.'" According to Zontek, the situation...
Poa trivialis is a foe, not a friend, for many in 'epidemic' regions

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has become more manifest in the last five years, with poa trivialis' growing popularity among Southern golf superintendents for winter overseeding. Seed companies have been growing more of it and it has in one way or another infested growing fields of bentgrass and bluegrass. The infestation is exacerbated in central Oregon where farmers flood-irrigate, thus washing the poa triv from one field into another.

"It doesn't take much poa trivialis to contaminate bluegrass or bentgrass," Zontek said. Indeed, to test the aggressiveness of poa trivialis, Rutgers University researchers mixed 40 grams of poa triv seed in a 50-pound bag of "non-aggressive" Kentucky bluegrass and seeded a field. Three years later, the trivialis had taken over more than 50 percent of that bluegrass.

But Rutgers' Dr. Reed Funk tempered the issue, saying: "A lot of this hype on poa triv is real, a lot is hype. People learn to identify a new plant and immediately start saying it's a big problem. It's been here longer than you or I have."

Saying that bluegrasses imported from northwest Europe have, at least in the last 50 years, contained "large amounts" of poa triv, Funk added that today's turf-maintenance practices of high fertility, heavy irrigation and short mowing height have enhanced its presence.

"You'd be hard-pressed to find a bentgrass green where you don't find a little bit of poa triv," said Arman Suny, former superintendent and current general manager at Shadow Creek Golf Club in Las Vegas. Suny sings its praises as "a wonderful putting surface for overseeding," adding that any "problem" with it is one of aesthetics because it's shiny leaf makes it more noticeable.

But Zontek said: "The problem is that in a hot summer it can go dormant, or die and you have big patches of dead grass."

Finger-pointing and lawsuits are going on in courtrooms regarding "poa triv," but the immediate impact for golf course superintendents is how to eliminate the triv they already have on their courses. Funk reported that Rutgers found "certain herbicides do a reasonable but not complete job of removing [poa triv]."

Chicpeo Alliote reportedly is hard on poa triv. And superintendent Mark Delsantro of Wyncote Country Club in Oxford, Pa., said he is experimenting with Fore WP (wettable powder) on his greens and collars to figure out a rate to put on Kentucky bluegrass without hurting the bentgrass. "If we do, we will be rich because we will patent the mix," he said.

Zontek said poa triv is more of a problem on newer golf courses, and Delsantro's fits that bill.
AS VEGAS, Nev. — While some Northern superintendents are anxiously battling poa trivialis takeover in areas of their golf courses, the rough bluegrass can be used to advantage, according to Arman Suny.

A former superintendent and turfgrass consultant who is currently general manager at Shadow Creek Golf Club here, Suny said: "In Palm Springs some of the best overseeded greens are with poa trivialis. It is a wonderful putting surface. While it is a weed, it's not one I worry about. It doesn't affect the game of golf."

Indeed, Suny said poa trivialis can be a problem-solver for spots on a golf course where it is difficult to grow turf. "It's a grass we probably don't use enough," he said. "There are probably a lot of places we could use it. It's a great short-day grower and Kentucky bluegrass is not. So you've got a grass that in the spring and even into the fall will flat out-grow Kentucky bluegrass. It will start growing before the cool-season grasses do — ryegrass included. It's a much more aggressive spreader than ryegrass. It starts earlier, grows later and moves faster laterally.

"So, in places where you've got limited daylight, or a lot of early-season golf when there's not much sun, it's a viable grass to look at."

He said he has used poa trivialis in shade situations on collars. "Nobody notices," he said. "It's a wonderful tool. If your percentage gets higher, you might have a problem with it on your greens."

Although superintendents have problems with poa trivialis dying in some parts of the country, "in other areas it will never, ever die out," Suny said.

Referring to one-time mentor Richie Valentine at Merion Country Club outside Philadelphia, he said: "Richie taught me some tricks. One was, if you have a terrible, shaggy green or tee and you can't grow anything on it, you could put bluegrass on it and just seed it once a month, and you could fake it pretty good. I had a green in Philly with poa trivialis and Red Top. It didn't put like a great game of golf. "If it doesn't, who's got a problem with it?" he asked.

Epidemic

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Searching for a weed problem

The blue tag-certified seed basically says what's in the bag is that variety. If you saw what is allowable in terms of weed-seed and crop-seed percentages, you'd die. Dale Kern, owner of Seed Technology, an independent seed-testing laboratory in Marysville, Ohio, said the solution to the problem lies in "the buyers setting the standards."

State regulators certify blue-black bentgrass seed by testing 2.5 grams of seed per lot. But a seed lot can have as many as 55,000 pounds of bentgrass.

"That's okay for the homeowner," Kern said, "but when you're planting a whole golf course, it is a different situation."

Kern said superintendents might want seed tested at 100 grams per lot, or even more. "But that can get expensive," he said, noting that the cost for a 50-gram check is $150.

"On certified sod-quality Kentucky bluegrass, they check 10 grams only looking for poa annu,

"For years we were running 100-gram samples. But that changed a couple of years ago. This year, we haven't had one request for a 100-gram test."

Terra Soils' Price said: "Quality control: A lot more seed testing needs to be done... The seed-testing labs did not have a lot of expertise in even identifying poa trivialis seed. Now the problem is pretty evident and seed technicians are becoming more aware of the difference between poa trivialis and bluegrass seed."

"Once they get a handle on that, I think they will begin to solve the problem... They obviously have to test more grams of seed. This lot [I bought] was 6,000 pounds. Ten grams of seed tested out of 6,000 pounds is suspect, to say the least."

Although, as Hurley stated: "I'm not saying it couldn't come in with the seed. But if the conclusion is that there is a problem with poa trivialis because of the seed companies and seed farmers, that is grossly simplified and not looking at the big picture. The big picture is: It is all over the place and has been for centuries."