Zoysiagrass's territory expanding into northern regions of transition zone

BY MARK LESLIE

BETTSVILLE, Md. — Golf course superintendents are pushing the envelope on zoysiagrasses, trying to get the turf which plays so well on fairways to survive further north.

"For use on fairways, zoysia is getting a lot more attention," said Kevin Morris, national director of the National Turfgrass Evaluation Program, based here. "People are trying it much farther north. It is into Indiana and even the Cincinnati area. It's not taking over the market, but it is being used more and more."

Sod growers in the South, he said, "are shipping a lot of sod into the upper South and even the upper transition zone. In fact, the transition zone is probably its best fit.

"Bermudagrass is more aggressive, but where winter kill is a problem zoysia is better because it is more winter-hardy. It also uses less pesticides and water. And it makes a really good playing surface in the winter. Its leaves are very stiff and upright and hold the ball well."

Morris reported that seeded varieties of zoysia that have been on the market haven't been used much but will be as more people find out about them.

Supporting that statement, Turf Merchants, Inc. (TFI) of Tangent, Ore., reported that supplies of Zen zoysia are completely sold out until the new crop is harvested in July. One of the first proprietary seeded zoysias, the Zen line has been sold out since its first production in 1995, according to TFI's Steve Tubbs.

The vegetatively propagated zoysias are finding more of a place on fairways because they are finer textured and can be mowed closer.

The newest national test plots for zoysia were planted last summer, and data on them will be available next year, Morris said.

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