Traditionally, in the fall, golf courses in warmer climates have overseeded their Bermudagrass (which goes dormant in the winter) with ryegrass. This keeps the course green during the colder winter months. This maintenance practice has its advantages and disadvantages. The obvious benefit is the aesthetics of mowing patterns that appeal to many golfers or club members. Another benefit is playability, as ryegrass provides fluffy turf for additional golf ball support. Unfortunately, these benefits have side effects that become evident the following summer when transitioning back to Bermudagrasses. Depending on weather patterns, weak areas may take a few weeks to a couple of months to properly recover. Overseeding annually also provides plenty of food for nematode survival during the cooler months.

Budget cuts, and the increased labor costs associated with overseeding, have made more and more superintendents wonder whether overseeding is the right choice. When you choose to overseed, you commit to more of everything such as water, fertilizer, labor, hours on the mowers and chemicals.

"Each course is different, but it comes down to the question: can you make an overseed budget that can show a profit?" explains Anthony Williams, director of golf course
... while golfers may be more complimentary of the aesthetics of the course it does not necessarily translate to more revenue.

— Anthony Williams, Stone Mountain Golf Club
her team at the Seed Research of Oregon are always looking into new seed varieties and studying the past to understand what still might work today. They've been looking at using other seed species in an overseeding mix such as chewings fescue.

"I looked back at old literature by Dr. James Beard, the guru in turf, who found in its seedling state that bentgrass didn't get its roots deep enough into the thatch, which made it easier to transition than a ryegrass," Brilman says. "We have a grad student looking at water requirements when you are first seeding grass species. A lot of the ones we know are more drought tolerant when they are seedlings. People need to look at these options. We assume certain things that we have not verified through research, but we can't just ignore what was done 20 to 30 years ago because sometimes you get some new clues from it."

Brilman adds greenkeepers shouldn't take an all-or-nothing approach. There are alternatives if you get creative. If you are cutting back, change the seeding rate or maybe just overseed the landing zones. "This gives you the best of both worlds," she says. "Try turning your course into a target golf experience by overseeding and greening it up only where golfers typically land. I know other superintendents who have overseeded just the rough and not the fairways."

Out on the west coast, Jim Alwine, superintendent at Stockton Golf & Country Club in California — the home to PGA Tour player and former U.S. Amateur champion Ricky Barnes — says they didn't overseed last year. The biggest reason was cost. He figures they saved $35,000 by not overseeding — which included the cost of seed, the reduced need of fertilization and the associated labor costs. Stockton G&CC also booked more tournaments during a time when the course was normally closed for overseeding — bringing in extra revenue. The other big reason Alwine chose not to overseed was members were upset over the course being closed during the fall — a prime playing time. And, with an older membership, having six weeks of cart path-only golf would restrict them from playing even when the course was open. When Alwine arrived at Stockton, he thought they needed to overseed just to have something to play on since most of their course is below sea level, with levies surrounding it.

"I proposed we didn't overseed for the health of the golf course," he says. "Bermudagrass is stronger and we don't get much play
in the winter, so we are going to get softer
whether there is ryegrass out there or not. So,
I said, 'Why take away the best time of the year
to golf for the time that sees the least play?'
Financially, it made."

Alwine also let the Poa come into his fair-
ways, so there was still turf to play on in the
winter months, rather than making members
play on mud. When the heat comes around
in the spring the Poa fades quicker than the
ryegrass traditionally did. "It worked out
well," he says. "It was spotty in areas, but all
in all, members told me they couldn't tell that
I didn't overseed."

Leaving the last word to Williams, he says
these days it's all about the bottom line. "I
remember a time when overseeding was
considered the cost of doing business. Those
days are over. We evaluate this issue each year
and balance the return on investment with the
golfers' true expectation." GCI

David McPherson is a freelance writer based
in Toronto.

The argument for and against NOT overseeding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages of not overseeding:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Savings on cost of seed/labor/energy</td>
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<tr>
<td>No spring transition – can sustain a stronger strand of warm season grasses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Water conservation (i.e. less water is used to establish and maintain ryegrass)</td>
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<td>Uninterrupted fall play – play can continue as normal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ease of weed control – better control of all types of weeds</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nematode control – environmental factors that control nematodes are temperatures and food; overseeding produces lots of roots for nematodes to feed on</td>
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<tr>
<td>No continuous mowing – crew members can work on aesthetics or projects</td>
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<tr>
<td>No unsightly tracking of ryegrass</td>
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<tr>
<th>Advantages of overseeding:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Aesthetics – No lush green color or mowing patterns</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wear – Some areas will get thin from cart traffic, reducing playability</td>
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<td>Marketability – Players prefer green</td>
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