Lippia Possible Warm Country Fairway Turf

BY PROF. P. B. KENNEDY,
(Experiment Station, University of California.)

MAT grass is another name given to Lippia. The mat part of the name is appropriate but not the grass as it is not a grass but a verbena. Lippia is a good name. It is so named for August Lippi, a French traveler 1678-1704. The well-known lemon verbena shrub of gardens and greenhouses esteemed for its fragrant leaves is Lippia citrodora.

There is some confusion in the literature with regard to the common species of Lippia grown in California. The specimens we have observed in a wild state and under cultivation are the same. Yet our cultivated one is said to have been introduced by Franceschi into California in 1900 from South America. He calls his plant Lippia repens Hort. Bailey in the “Manual of Cultivated Plants” regards L. repens as a synonym of L. canescens and does not mention L. nodiflora yet in his “Cyclopedia of American Horticulture.” L. nodiflora is recognized as being under cultivation and an annual with some qualms as to whether or not “annual” is correct. The California plants both wild and cultivated, are very distinctly perennial.

I am inclined to believe that the South American introduced plant is the same as our own species found near streams in open places along the banks. It is frequently subjected to floods for short periods during the winter and to more or less dry conditions during the summer. Such localities are frequently alkaline and yet Lippia seems to thrive as long as there is a little moisture present from seepage. The cold tolerance of the introduced or the native plant commonly grown in California is probably somewhere around 12 degrees F.

There are other species perhaps not yet introduced into cultivation, viz., L. lanceolata and L. cuneifolia that resemble our plant in their creeping habit but which must be more hardy as they are found growing in the colder parts of the west, the middle west and the east.

The Lippia now under cultivation is a low growing creeping perennial, rooting at the joints, with small bright green leaves and small short heads of rose-white flowers.
extending a few inches beyond the foliage. It is quite frequently used as a lawn both in the hot interior valley and along the coast. Quite commonly it is used to cover steep banks not suitable for lawns. Lippia should be planted in the sun and not in the shade and given whatever water that can be spared. The results obtained will be commensurate with the attention given to it in the preparation of the soil, amount of fertilizer and watering.

On the other hand it may be called the lazy man's lawn plant as it can get along with very little water and practically no mowing.

With regard to what I think about it for golf, I would say that Lippia, including the hardy creeping species not yet introduced, has a good future more particularly for the fairways than for the greens.

The sod becomes closer, smoother and finer by severe trampling but if allowed to have its own way and not kept in subjection it has a tendency to become straggly and unsightly. I would not expect Lippia ever to produce so fine a quality of turf as our best golf grasses but it certainly has merit and is entitled to more consideration from greenkeepers, especially where they are confronted with sandy soil subject to saline or alkaline conditions.

Though Lippia can be grown from seed it is more difficult to get a stand by this method. For this reason seed is seldom available on the market. The customary and certain method is by division of the rooted parts in the manner of vegetative grass plantings. The catalogue price of the rooted cuttings is $1.50 per flat or about $10.00 per thousand. It requires about 300 plants to the square rod although double the number would hasten the formation of a sod. Sod may be obtained from a Lippia lawn divided into small pieces, and each piece planted 6-inches to 1-foot apart each way.

Lippia is more or less dormant in the winter and is inclined to brown slightly with the frost. On the approach of spring it greens up rapidly and revels in the heat with an occasional watering.

The little nobs representing the blossoms are not attractive from a lawn standpoint but these can be very easily eliminated by setting the mower high and cutting off the blossoms every two or three weeks during the flowering season.