

golf business

THE GREAT POA ANNUA DEBATE

In our "Viewpoint" column in the September issue of *GOLF BUSINESS*, we discussed the never-ending controversy over *Poa annua* on the golf course and asked readers for their opinion on whether superintendents should try to "keep it or kill it." Dozens responded. Sixteen of them plainly said "kill it." Two suggested killing it on greens but keeping it on other parts of the course. And 35 said "keep it" — though usually with suggestions either for overcoming it by overseeding and mechanical means or for making the most of it with proper fertilization and irrigation.

As promised, we're publishing a selection of replies, in hopes that you can benefit from the knowledge and experience of others. As you might expect, there is no pat answer to the question of treating annual bluegrass — there are too many variables. But what works for a course similar to yours, situated in a similar climate, is likely to work for you. — **Dave Slaybaugh**



Keep it. Our golf course is over 50 years old and infested with *Poa annua*. In the past, we tried to control the *Poa annua* and only succeeded in losing some of our greens in the summer. Now we just water a little more, use no chemical for *Poa annua* control, and have beautiful greens year-round.

John J. Huda, superintendent
Fort Dix Golf Course
Fort Dix, N.J.



Kill it. If *Poa* is all you have and you can't afford to control it, kill it and overseed with bent. Anyone who plays golf on *Poa* knows the inconsistency of putting on it from morning until afternoon. Soon after mowing *Poa* is fine, but by afternoon with seedheads sprouting and various growth patterns, putting is totally different. *Poa* becomes puffy with high and low spots. It does not provide a good, consistent putting surface.

Tim Berg, director of golf
City of Portland, Ore.



We have three courses here at the Broadmoor. The east course is approximately 80 to 90 percent *Poa*; West course, 60 percent *Poa*; South course, just opened in 1976, approximately 5 percent *Poa*. It is mid-May to June 1 before *Poa* is out and fairways filled in on East and West courses spring. Once it is established and because of our 6,500-foot altitude we have very little trouble keeping it throughout the summer. There simply could not be a better playing surface anywhere than *Poa* cut down to 1/2 inch on fairways and 3/32 inch on greens.

However, since we are in the resort business, we feel the guest deserves good playing condition before mid-May. The new South course has Emerald bent greens and bluegrass fairways which are all in beautiful shape by April 1.

Even in this climate where it is rare to lose *Poa* due to

heat, my vote goes to the bents and bluegrasses, if nothing else for the peace of mind which comes from the predictability of these grasses. It is a good feeling to know in the spring I will have greens and not browns.

My feeling is that a continual program of overseeding the worst *Poa* areas with a ryegrass-bluegrass mix is wise until the time comes when a 100 percent foolproof *Poa annua* control is developed which can guarantee that my bluegrasses and bentgrasses will always survive regardless of what type of freak ecological conditions may arise.

Chuck Clark, director
Broadmoor Golf Courses
Colorado Springs, Colo.



Kill it. So far the best approach to achieving my goal has been through heavy overseeding in weaker or barren spots as they appear on fairways. On greens, early spring overseeding with spot work throughout the season has worked very well.

James E. Wilson, superintendent
Orange County Golf Club
Middletown, N.Y.



Wilshire Country Club is over 90 percent *Poa* (greens and fairways), and we are told that it is in the best condition of any course in Southern California. In April 1978 Michigan State University published Research Report 352. On pages 18-19 they outline a program for making *Poa* work. Basically Wilshire has been following this program for years with excellent results.

J.H. McMillen, greens chairman
Tony Catada, superintendent
Wilshire Country Club
Los Angeles, Calif.



Kill it if you can and keep on fighting it. It's bumpy and uneven, especially when in the flower and seed stages, and will desert you when you need it most — mid-season. I've had good results with tricalcium arsenate, sterilized topdressing, and removal of aerator plugs.

L.R. Shields, CGCS, superintendent
Woodmont Country Club
Rockville, Md.



In the past we have spent much money on control chemicals for *Poa annua*, but we never saw any appreciable results. I do not waste money on these chemicals anymore. Here in the Sacramento Valley, when it gets super hot in July and August, our *Poa* starts dying out, leaving thin coverage of bentgrasses on the greens. A couple years ago when I stopped using chemical controls, I started a good overseeding program in the fall and incorporated it in the

verticutting, aerating, and topdressing process. This alone has given me more bentgrasses on the greens when the *Poa* goes than any of the chemical control programs used in the past.

This past year, although we had nearly 2 weeks of temperatures near 108° and we had 100,000 rounds played, we had very little barren ground on any of our 20 greens. I feel if we follow this program for another year or two, our loss due to *Poa* will be next to nothing. I say KEEP IT as long as you can.

John G. Kalostos, superintendent
Ancil Hoffman County Park Golf Course
Carmichael, Calif.



Kill it! On greens: Apply bensulide in spring (no cultivating or overseeding for 3 months, May/June/July). Heavy aerating in August (don't try this without an adequate irrigation system, and not during temperatures above 90°F.). Topdress with sandy mix containing enough soil (15 percent?) to retain water for germinating seedlings (I verticut the aeration cores and mat back in.) Overseed with bentgrass and water.

By the time *Poa* seedheads start forming in September, the aeration holes are filled with bentgrass. Don't open the turf again that year. Prevent open areas for *Poa* to germinate in.

I keep turf lean all season (about 5 pounds N/1,000 square feet/year) and irrigate deeply and infrequently. If vertical mowing is necessary to prevent excess buildup of mat, it should be done lightly, not when *Poa* is seeding heavily, and followed by overseeding with bentgrass to have good seed available to out-compete any potential *Poa* seed. Deep cultivating will destroy bensulide layer.

Gregory R. Davis, superintendent
Niagara Falls Country Club
Lewiston, N.Y.



In Florida, we kill it with Kerb. That won't work in the north. The new bulletin put out by Dr. Beard, et al., and sponsored by the USGA has some very interesting insights and ideas both pro and con.

Scott A. Sincerbeau, superintendent
Royal Palm Yacht & Country Club
Boca Raton, Fla.



Keep it! We have to. Our greens have better than 60 percent *Poa*. During May of each year we have plenty of seed pods—if you want some, just ask. But I use most of them myself to reseed my tees. This summer was the driest in years, but our greens have never been better, due to watching irrigation and fertilization closely and raising green mower height to 5/16 inch. We don't irrigate our fairways and the *Poa* dies . . . but so does everyone else's.

Tom Williams, superintendent
Orchard Valley Golf Course
Nedrow, N.Y.



I have been both "fighting" and "managing" *Poa annua* for 25 years at courses in both northern and southern

California. I have yet to see a successful elimination of this grass either by chemical or mechanical means. I have seen comparative miracle management results without chemical useage. All too often the "grass" gets the blame for incompetent management practices.

Ralph B. Gillingham
Baywood Golf & Country Club
Arcata, Calif.



Kill it! That is, the *Poa*. With Penncross greens and bermuda tees and fairways, *Poa* infestation in greens affects the putting during July and August and definitely retards the return of bermuda on tees and fairways in spring. A selective herbicide for *Poa* on bent would sell like hotcakes even though the bent may be bruised for a few days. Kill it in the South — I'll let the Yankees have it if they wish.

Wes Brown, owner and general manager
Mocassin Bend Golf Club
Chattanooga, Tenn.



In March of this year I took over as superintendent of Brown's Lake Golf Association. My greens had a 2½-inch layer of thatch and were 90 percent *Poa annua*. If I had tried to eradicate the *Poa annua*, I would have had only a brown mat to putt on. With adequate fertilization and proper mowing height, my greens are in very good condition, and the bent is filling in faster than I expected. I feel it is better to live with *Poa annua* than kill it.

Lanier Wood, superintendent
Brown's Lake Golf Association
Burlington, Wis.



Keep it! Continually overseed critical areas with a mixture of bent (Penncross) or ryegrasses (Pennfine and Manhattan) as they wilt or fade out. Could also sod out bad areas if proper drainage is installed in your low areas.

Rodney A. Voykin, superintendent
Green Acres Country Club
Northbrook, Ill.



Based on two premises — one, that some grass is better than none; and two, that a closed golf course benefits no one — we have but one solution: to manage properly.

We are all too familiar with the various factors that affect *Poa annua* populations. Water, compaction, fertility, mowing heights, etc. all can be regulated somewhat by our maintenance practices. Merely by holding off on water and aerating often we can gain on the problem. With the use of various chemicals to retard the aggressive *Poa* and promote new seedlings, we can also gain.

There are many things that can be done without killing existing turf or closing down a fairway or green. Once you have exhausted all of these manipulations over years of work you can suggest killing off the entire golf course. Most of these programs result in the same percentages of *Poa* within a few years anyway, unless the cultural maintenance practices discourage *Poa*.

Bennett Wartman
Farm & Golf Supply
Philadelphia, Pa.