

In Defense of Perennial Ryegrass

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I was quite surprised by Dr. Hall's article in the May Agronomist. Many of the Washington area superintendents have been using the new perennial ryegrasses quite successfully for the past few years. I began by experimenting about six years ago. I'm now committed to what I think is a sound program of their use. I feel that the article's title rings a true note—"Don't Send a Ryegrass to do a Bluegrass's Work," for I've yet to see a Bluegrass variety that will perform like some of these Ryegrasses. I will not, in these following lines, defend the use of Ryegrass in new seedings. I myself, would try other species in initial establishment. I'm going to confine my remarks to its use on existing golf courses in the Mid-Atlantic area.

Many of us Mid-Atlantic Turf Managers feel we have been throwing our money away trying to get a little Bluegrass established on our golf courses. Each new hybrid raised our hopes again. The thatcher seeders looked like they might help. But, alas, how much Bluegrass do we have in our fairways now after all this time, effort, and frustration.

High soil temperatures, golf turf height of cut, Fusarium roseum, other diseases and limiting factors just won't allow us to grow good Bluegrass turf.

As many of you know, I've got thirteen nice Pencross tees from three to six years old here at Washington Golf and Country Club. This was accomplished by a rebuilding program and a solid Bentgrass maintenance program. This program costs plenty. The five other tees were small Poa Annua tees! Two are par threes. These are the tees I started experiments with Rye.

I started looking seriously at the Perennial Ryegrasses in the summer of 1971 when my newly seeded tees held up so well. I noted especially its ability to hold up to the 7/8 inch of cut, its vigor in competing with Poa Annua and Crabgrass and how it managed to hold up in the hot weather. Sure it thinned out a little and allowed a few

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weeks to come in. But it still provided me with the best 1st tee I'd had to date without rebuilding.

The next year (72), I seeded all five of my old tees with Ryegrass, some to a Pelo and some to Manhattan. I was pleased and so were my members. In 1973 I seeded these same tees and about 8 ft. of my aprons to Manhattan as I felt it performed a little better than Pelo. All these past seedings were (after thatching) at 5 lb. per 1,000 sq. ft. I also seeded four fairways that fall at 45 lb. per acre in one direction with a Rogers Seeder. Again I was more than pleased with my results.

Last fall I expanded my program by seeding the complete apron on all the holes, overseeded (opposite direction) the four fairways I seeded in 1973 and seeded four more fairways.

The past two years I've combined a pre-emergence crabgrass control program with the seeding program. My tees and aprons are treated with Betesan at 8 ounces per M. Manhattan Ryegrass has given me the best tees and aprons I've had in 15 years, no more Poa to Crab cycle. They've held up well through the summer, with little or no disease so far.

I've learned one important thing—fertilize lightly unless you want to mow every day in the spring; or rake clippings. But as far as I'm concerned a golf course turf can hardly be too vigorous.

Trying to establish a Bluegrass turf into Poa Annua has been next to impossible for me. Ryegrass has been my answer. It's great!



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