



## OVERSEEDING... *Boon or Curse?* The Rest Of The Story

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Overseeding a golf course to permit green winter playing conditions has always been controversial. It is expensive, time consuming, and reduces summer bermudagrass quality. I would like to explore why it is done and examine the consequences of not overseeding.

The FORE Magazine article Sep/Oct 2002 established the basic issues of this topic. The following will update the information presented in that article.

### The following are provided as an overview of the controversy behind overseeding:

- Overseeding of warm season grasses using cool-season grasses is done to provide a green winter playing surface when the warm season grass is dormant.
- Historically overseeding is done in the fall beginning with seedbed preparation by scalping the grass, vertical mowing, or brushing to provide a soil contact for the seed. This preparation process has been found to result in a degradation of the bermudagrass in summer periods.
- Traditional overseeding also depends on course closures of one to six weeks to allow the overseeded grass to germinate and establish for winter play.
- High levels of winter golf play usually result in additional degradation of summer bermudagrass health and play quality due to high traffic levels impacting the dormant grass from golf cart and related golfing play.

• If overseeding is done, the only way to keep high quality summer bermudagrass play quality is by replanting the weakened bermudagrass spots by sprigging, sodding, or seeding in the summer months. Core aeration, sand topdressing, and vertical mowing are also needed to resolve soil compaction problems caused by winter traffic, and to restore growing conditions needed for healthy bermudagrass.

If there are so many negatives why does anyone overseed? The main reason overseeding is done is because golfers want a green playing surface in winter. Golfers complain about having to play on "dirt" in winter. Resorts need winter play in the Southwestern United States since much of their revenue comes from winter play.

Also from years of overseeding we have found that you still need to maintain the golf course with cultivation such as core aeration, sand topdressing, and vertical mowing for turfgrass health whether overseeding is done or not. Weed management for grassy and broadleaf weeds is still needed.

Successful high quality golf courses inevitably must make the decision whether or not to overseed. Universities and golf courses throughout the Southern United States have been experimenting with ways to minimize the problems of new technologies for overseeding and optimize the benefits.

Since the Sep/Oct 2002 article, discussions and evaluations of overseeding done at two golf courses in San Diego County, CA, a golf course in Las Vegas, NV, and a golf course in Bakersfield, CA has been done. The new technology is the Turf Solutions Dry Spray Applicator™. The Turf Solutions Dry Spray Applicator™ is a machine that blows the seed out using a high-pressure pump and is designed to align the seeds into a vertical orientation as it is applied to the turf. This machine has been used throughout the Southeastern United States, in Texas, and now in Southern California.

### Benefits of this technology found in other parts of the country include:

- A very precise calibration and application of the machine eliminating seed wastage and problems

caused by irregular ground and wind during seeding.  $\frac{1}{3}$  less seed is needed due to this precision.

• Elimination of seedbed preparation such as scalping, vertical mowing, or brushing due to the high-pressure blower seed application. Following seed application, all seed was deposited at the crown level in common bermudagrass. Seed did not penetrate the canopy when applied to hybrid bermudagrass however.

• Elimination of course closure or special increased irrigation. Play continued during the overseeding process and no change from normal irrigation was required.

### Conclusions from these new procedures are listed below:

• As suspected, traffic does negatively impact seed germination and establishment. At one golf course in Southern California, two bermudagrass fairways were closed to golf cart traffic for six weeks after overseeding, while two other fairways were not closed to golf cart traffic. The two closed fairways had established grass two weeks earlier than the fairways subjected to unlimited cart traffic.

• Overseeding of all tees has produced an outstanding playing surface. No course closure other than the two fairways closed to traffic occurred. No change in irrigation practices was necessary, no seedbed preparation was required, and the overseeded tee and fairway playing conditions are fantastic.

• Since the machine is not able to penetrate the dense hybrid bermudagrass, dragging of seed following machine application will be needed to improve seed penetration in future. No dragging of seed is needed in common bermudagrass areas.

• Continued assessment is needed to determine if there will be any negative impacts to the bermudagrass from the overseeding process. This golf course has not been overseeded for the past three years and has very good quality bermudagrass.

These new technologies do show promise for reducing the negative impacts of overseeding. At present we still have no one grass that is capable of giving us 12 months of high playing quality.

