



Bentgrass Still Works In The South

By Bud White, regional director, Mid-Continent Region

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A superintendent recently pointed out that with all the deliberations about converting bentgrass to bermudagrass in the South and lower transition zone, no one seems to be discussing the qualities of bentgrass in the same region.

There are many courses in the South with wonderful bentgrass greens. Yes, summer is difficult, but many superintendents have great bentgrass greens for nine months of the year, excellent greens for two months, and very good greens for one month of the year. That's not a bad track record. Bentgrass in the South is a solid part of the turf industry, but these conditions do not exist without the talent and hard work of the golf course superintendents who take care of them.

It is often believed that bentgrass greens are wet, soft, and poor during the summer, and are not good in September and most of October while recovering from the stressful summer. That assumption cannot be made as a general rule. I see some ultradwarf greens that are not up to their potential during the prime growing season – a situation nearly always based on the maintenance and growing conditions. No one grass serves every situation, and each site needs to be carefully assessed to decide which grass species will perform better.

On a relatively lateral line from about North Dallas through Charlotte, NC will bermudagrass perform better than bentgrass over a ten-year average? Yes! Is it always a better choice for courses in the South? No!



A firm and high quality bentgrass green in late July in southern Oklahoma.

Case in point: If a course has significant shade around their greens, and management is unwilling to cut trees for the necessary sunlight requirements of bermudagrass, converting to bermudagrass may be the worst decision possible. Using management tools to deal with summer heat on bentgrass in the South is a better situation for a superintendent than having too much shade on bermudagrass greens, which is out of a golf course superintendent's control when these conditions apply.

I visit many courses each year where the superintendent produces exceptional surface quality, speed, and firmness throughout the summer stress months. The expertise of the maintenance staff and the growing environment play a major part in this success.

Generalized comments, such as “bentgrass barely hangs on through July and August --- it is almost ‘mush’ in July and August”; “bentgrass is soft and slow in July and August, and then it takes September and most of October to recover,” are sweeping assumptions. Each year I visit many courses with bentgrass greens that can compete with almost any ultradwarf course in July and August. This is due largely to the talent of the superintendent and the proper growing environment for the greens.

The bottom line: courses in the South or the lower transition zone have several choices in selecting of turf for their greens, but the environmental conditions for that selection should be at the top of the list.

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