Now There's Something You Don't See Everyday

By Bob Vavrek, agronomist, Central Region

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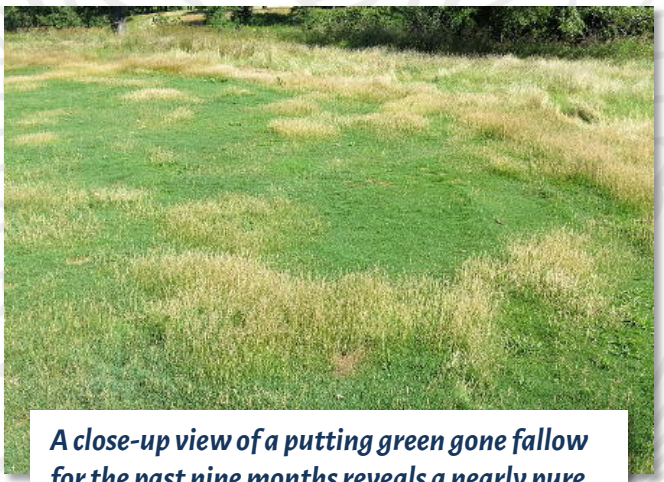
Ever wonder what a 70-year-old putting green would look like in August if it lay fallow all season…no water, no mowing, no fungicide and no fertilizer? To be honest, I really hadn't either, but it sure was interesting to walk on a green that has gone back to nature for the past nine months.

What I did see was just as surprising as what I didn't see. It was an ankle deep stand of nearly pure creeping bentgrass going to seed. Not all the grass was seeding, just small, isolated patches of turf and I couldn't help but speculate what the surface looked like this time last year. I imagine it was a patchwork quilt of various bentgrass colonies that had unique colors and textures.



A close-up view of a putting green gone fallow for the past nine months reveals a nearly pure stand of ankle deep bentgrass with scattered, dense patches of seedheads. What would the turf look like if the seed was harvested and used to establish another small nursery green?

There weren't many weeds and what the heck happened to the *Poa annua*? It was nowhere to be found and perhaps had little chance of competing with bentgrass without inputs of water and fertilizer in a site that receives plenty of sunlight and air movement. Only a smidgen of disease activity that looked like dollar spot (*Sclerotinia homoeocarpa*) on steroids was found here and there. I walked off the green with far more questions in my mind than when I first walked on that old putting surface

enjoying its first year of retirement. However, I was sure of two things – the green was really, really slow and it would hold a golf shot like flypaper.

A short note from Keith Happ: While on the subject of bentgrass, there are times of the season and weather conditions that favor this grass. Fertilizing at the time of year when bentgrass is growing and competitive will help to perpetuate the healthy stand you want to maintain. The recent change in the weather has allowed many superintendents to adjust their fertility programs and the results have been very impressive. When it is hot and humid, less product applied more frequently is the approach used most often. When the weather is favorable, a more aggressive, yet controlled fertility approach can be employed. Spraying rates of nitrogen at 0.15 to 0.2 lbs. N per 1000 sq. ft. every 7 to 10 days has worked very well during this change in the weather.

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