



Green Section Record

REGIONAL UPDATE

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Warm-season fairways and cool-season roughs provide vivid contrast during the winter months, but this look may be objectionable to some.

SIDE EFFECTS MAY INCLUDE...

BY CORY ISOM | AGRONOMIST, WEST REGION

“Side effects may include...” is the familiar refrain heard at the end of nearly every drug commercial ever made. One thing that’s become clear to me in the golf course maintenance business is that for nearly everything that’s done on the golf course, there are also side effects.

Recent Course Consulting Service visits to golf courses in central and northern California have focused on, among other things, the potential conversion of cool-season turf to hybrid bermudagrass. As water concerns continue to dominate the golf world, especially in the West, there is a growing desire to utilize grasses that require less of this critical and increasingly expensive resource. Hybrid bermudagrasses typically use anywhere from 20%-50% less water than their cool-season counterparts in similar climates.



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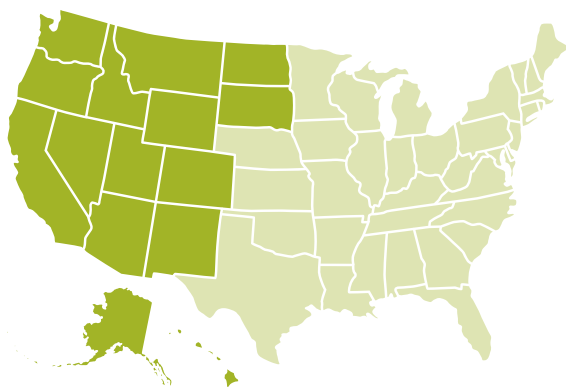
In northern California, there are some great success stories from courses that have replaced cool-season fairway or rough turf with hybrid bermudagrass. Water savings, better-than-expected winter playability and color retention, and exceptional summer playing conditions are the common themes among these success stories.

However, as great as these stories are, there are some consequences that come with the decision to convert from cool-season to warm-season grasses. During cool weather, typically from Thanksgiving through February in California, warm-season turf growth slows considerably. Side effects may include:

- Nonexistent divot recovery
- Turf may not be the desired color
- Higher mowing heights lead to less ball roll
- Cart traffic may need to be restricted

No successful turf conversion projects are undertaken on a whim. Many months and years of trials and research were conducted to ensure that a particular variety of warm-season grass was the best choice for a given property. These side effects were identified long before a wholesale conversion took place and were considered worthwhile tradeoffs for the long-term benefit of the facility.

As course managers consider turf conversion projects like this, it is imperative to look at all the factors involved. Visit other facilities that have done what you're considering. Talk to your peers and your regional USGA agronomist. Make sure you have all the information to make an informed recommendation. Lastly, during the research or trial phase at your facility and – more importantly – once a conversion happens, provide continuous and proactive communication to manage expectations. Side effects may include informed and satisfied golfers.



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