

Search is on for the 'ideal' seed mixture...

This article is abridged from the booklet: TURF ON THE GOLF COURSE, by Robert Laycock, Rolawn Technical Director. Copies free on request to BIGGA HQ.

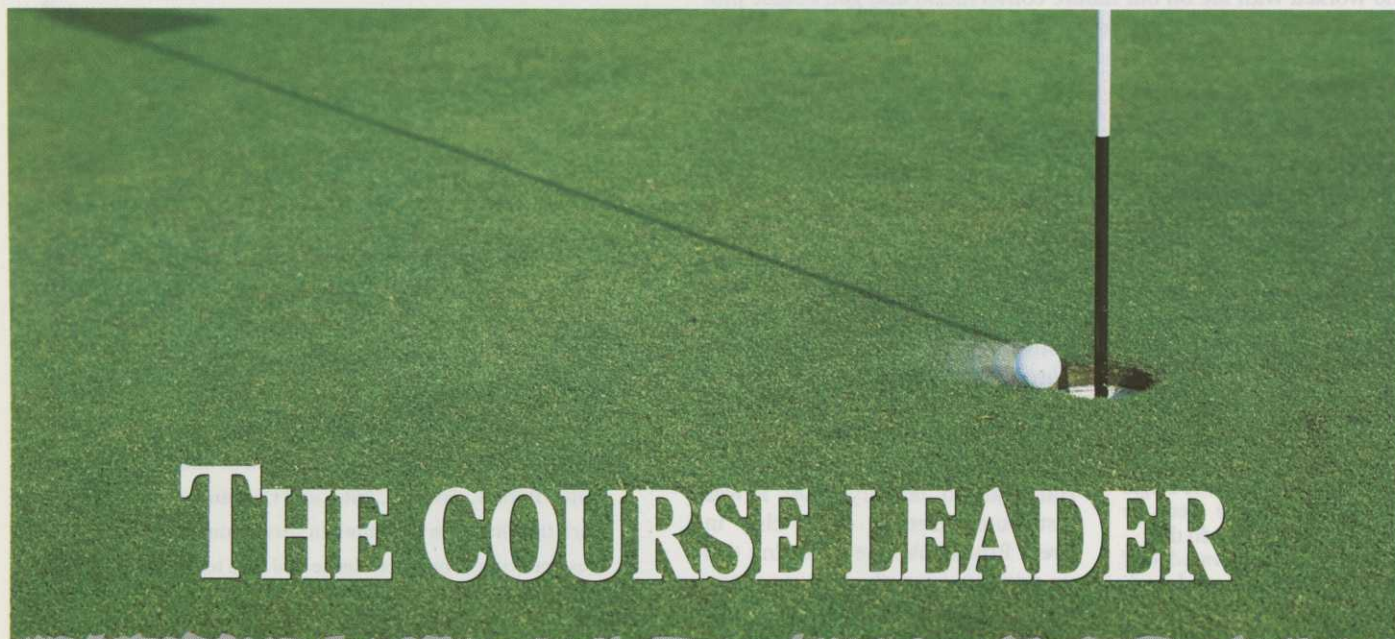
In theory, the use of seed gives the user the widest choice of species and cultivars, and it should be possible to pick and choose the best for each particular situation. In practice, however, the constructor tends to choose from the ranges of proprietary mixtures offered by the major seed houses. In devising their mixtures the seedsmen inevitably have to compromise between availability and price. Some desirable cultivars are effectively exclusive to a seedsman and so the 'ideal' seed mixture remains hypothetical. Even so, the annual STRI seed guide enables an objective comparison to be made.

Given time, seed can give a first class surface. It does not introduce any undesired soil types to the course and is by far the cheapest method. Unfortunately in the

British climate, seed is significantly slower than turf.

The use of turf speeds up the establishment time of greens – the most crucial part of the course – and it is here that turfing is becoming the conventional way of quickly obtaining an established putting surface.

Good cultivated turf is purpose-grown from different seed mixtures by suppliers who have an established reputation and should be mature, uniformly cut, weed-free and available year round. Choosing the most appropriate is the key to success. From a practical view there is less risk involved in creating a new green from turf, for seeded greens are notoriously subject to adverse weather conditions and weed invasion. Indeed there are many who in going for the immediate saving which seed



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Turf provides less risk, takes less time

brings have found that they have had to pay for seed and turf as well, together with suffering delays.

Turf for Golf Greens

By far the most common grass to spoil the uniformity of the green is annual meadow grass (*Poa annua*). This weed grass has a faster growth speed than most other grasses and, if present in conditions which suit it, may take over the whole green. It is susceptible to diseases and has poor colour in drought and winter.

Fescue/Bent Turf

'As an ideal surface on which to play year round golf, fescue / bent turf cannot be surpassed'. - The Way Forward - published by the R & A Greenkeeping Panel, 1989.

The normal turf used on North European golf greens consists of fine-leaved fescues (Chewings and/or slender creeping red fescue) and browntop bent and is the surface recommended by the R & A and the STRI.

The traditional seed mixture for greens turf is 80% Chewings fescue: 20% browntop bent, which should yield a turf containing a good balance of these species. The ideal green should contain both fescue and bent but the proportions will depend on prevailing site and management conditions.

Current high levels of play, coupled with inadequate green drainage, have led many fescue / bent greens to deteriorate to the extent that they now consist mainly of *Poa annua* with some bent. Good construction and management will avoid this happening, but if not cared for the fescue is the first to go.

When buying fescue / bent turf look for an assurance from the supplier that their turf is free from *Poa*.

Cumberland or Sea-Washed Turf

Harvested mainly from the Solway Firth sea marshes, sea-washed turf consists mainly of native fine-leaved fescues with little, if any, bentgrass and the soil is silty. The fine particle size of this soil inhibits drainage and may lead to compaction and surface water retention. As well as badly drained greens, this in turn leads to *Poa* invasion once out of the salty environment. It is virtually impossible to keep this turf pure on an inland course.


Pure Fescue Cultivated Turf

This is a recent version of sea-washed turf. Using seeds of cultivars of fine-leaved fescues, it can be grown on soils other than those of estuaries. Pure fescue turf is very fine-leaved and can look impressive to the uninitiated on first inspection.

Pure Bent Turf

In the USA and on American influenced courses in Europe, creeping bentgrass (usually Penncross), is the accepted grass for golf greens. Its use in this country is controversial. It is usually established from seed though a very small amount is being grown for turf. Creeping bentgrass greens need a different management approach from conventional fescue/bent greens because they spread by the production of above-ground stolon (creeping stems). This essentially means more frequent verticutting than on fescue/bent turf.

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- The Way Forward,
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