

# Seeds of success

**Michel Mulder, managing director of Barenbrug, explains why you should pay more and buy better quality mixtures of seeds.**



**Quality varieties like Barkoel pay for themselves because they require less maintenance**

**M**any greenkeepers make the mistake of selecting grass seed mixtures on the basis of price. This is not surprising when you consider the budgets that most greenkeepers are working with and the pressures put on them by their golf clubs. Yes, even with things that are as essential as grass seed.

The trouble is a cheap grass seed mixture leads to a bad sward, more maintenance (and

associated costs), it requires more water and fertiliser and earlier overseeding – which shows that, in the end, quality pays off and

can actually save money.

The 1994 turfgrass seed booklet from the Sports Turf Research Institute shows that the difference in quality between the top varieties and the average of each major list is huge. (Figure 1).

This means that you can increase the quality of the sward by over 30 per cent by using varieties which are proven to be better.

More and more greenkeepers are realising this, as there has been a significant increase recently in the demand in the UK for quality varieties (and British Seed Houses says there may well be a shortage of the better cultivars of perennial ryegrass by the end of the year). This increasing demand for better quality seed mixtures is not just coming from greenkeepers renovating/over-sowing their greens, tees and fairways, but also from turf producers who are being asked by greenkeepers for ever higher quality turf.

Higher quality varieties are needed as greenkeepers are con-

fronted with more complicated influences: heavily polluted soils, low maintenance requirements, environmental laws, saline conditions and extreme wear conditions for greens and tees. All of these problems highlight the need for accurate information in order to match specification to demand.

Therefore, ongoing discussions between the leading breeders and greenkeepers, architects, and agronomists is essential and enables breeders to collect and breed varieties which are tailor-made for golf courses.

One example of this is a new species that has entered the world of turfgrasses recently and is being hailed as a breakthrough in breeding. The species is crested hair-grass (koelera cristata). At Barenbrug we are calling our variety Barkoel.

The original breeding stock was found by chance on an old golf course. Despite drought conditions and infertile soil, certain very attractive, green grassplants were found to be thriving whilst others suffered. These were crested hair-grass, a grassplant common to many dry and sandy areas. A major programme of breeding and development followed, finally resulting in a uniform and stable variety which provides an extremely dense turf and very fine leaves which maintain an attractive green colour under the worst conditions. It has outstanding drought tolerance and remarkable disease resistance and can withstand very close mowing (under 20mm).

At Barenbrug, intensive testing has proved that Barkoel is best suited for fairways and (semi) rough when used with other species like red fescue and brown-

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**Figure 1**

	TOLERANCE CLOSE MOWING/SHOOT DENSITY	
	Average variety	Top variety
Browntop bent	Highland 4.8	Heliot/Bardot 7.1
Slender creeping red fescue	Average 6.4	Barcrown 8.9
Chewings fescue	Average 6.4	Baruba/Barqueen 7.1

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Higher quality varieties are needed to keep pace with quality requirements

top bent, the two most predominant grass types for golf courses.

At the STRI at Bingley and at the Bristol and Clifton Golf Club, they have been testing Barkoel on greens and the early indications are that it can compete with the top browntop bents even under a cutting regime that's down to 5-6mm.

### Conclusion

In the short term, choosing quality varieties will pay for themselves. In the long term, they will be more resistant to disease and, generally, make the greenkeeper's life a little easier because they require less maintenance. They will also enable him to achieve the result he wants.

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