

The seed industry has become increasingly sophisticated in recent years and keeping up with the new developments is a never ending task. This month we look at some of the Frequently Asked Questions greenkeepers fire at the seed companies while we also examine the re-emergence of Velvet Bent.

Removing any seeds of doubt



Seeds - THE FAQs.

Area Managers for seed companies spend much of their time travelling around the country, meeting greenkeepers and responding to enquiries about mixtures and cultivars.

Recently, three local representatives for one of these companies, BIGGA Golden Key Supporters Barenbrug, got together to compare notes on what people were commonly asking. What they found was that there is a common core of 10 to 20 queries which seemingly all greenkeepers want - indeed need - answered.

So, in keeping with a modern convention borrowed from the Internet, they have identified a list of greenkeepers' FAQs - or Frequently Asked Questions.

Ben Petitjean, Darren Wilding and Jayne Leyland have put together the salient facts to help get the most from your seed.

What if, for example, a greenkeeper wants to use a cultivar - but not in a mixture from a catalogue?

Well, many may be unaware that many companies have the facility to

tailor-make a mixture in order to find the right blend for the individual. A brochure is often no more than a recommended guide for different applications and certainly not set in stone.

Conversely, some have asked why they need to change cultivars which they have used quite happily for several years.

These may indeed have been adequate, but the development of new cultivars continues at a fast pace. Every year there are new cultivars with a greater tolerance to disease and drought, plus a corresponding increase in shoot density. It is seemingly a never-ending task for the turf manager to assess thoroughly his latest options.

Fortunately, by referring to the booklet produced by the STRI, greenkeepers can quickly and easily get up-to-date information on the top available cultivars. The STRI thoroughly trials them all, here in the UK, and publishes its findings.

The indispensable annual also helpfully segments the various grasses into categories for specific use.

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Many people have wondered where the various different cultivars have originated. Holland, France and the USA have usually been the main centres, but in many cases, the premier grass seeds available have increasingly been developed in, as well as for, the UK.

Each different area of the golf course is a rich source of discussion between greenkeepers and seed companies in the drive to find the right combination of seeds.

For example, given the wear tolerance of ryegrass, surely it follows that a 100% ryegrass mix is ideal for fairways? This is actually a question worth looking into in depth.

A total ryegrass mixture would not be recommended unless the fairways are suitably irrigated; ryegrass requires plenty of water for a good sward. It also needs to be remembered

that the plant must be well-fed with balanced fertiliser to keep it healthy. Then consider the appearance: a 100% ryegrass mixture would be coarser than a mixture containing fescues and bent grasses.

A red fescue in the mixture tends to be recommended, thus increasing the survival rate of the sward and improving its appearance. Fescues are excellent in drought situations and do not need to be constantly fed. Creeping varieties help to bind the sward together and

How does the greenkeeper makes his tees and fairways look their best in the face of serious wear and tear?

provide a quicker repair rate for golfer-inflicted damage.

In summary, a ryegrass/fescue mixture with perhaps a 10% bent grass component is often advised.

In contrast, the traditional green mix is often 80% fescue/20% bent and some have asked why this is so. Actually, these percentages refer to weight not the number of seeds. The true proportion should be 1,500 fescue seeds per gram and 15,000 bent seeds per gram.

Others have enquired whether it is possible to mow greens under 5mm. It is possible, according to the grass seed mixture present. A browntop bent mixture allows mowing slightly lower than 5mm, withstanding such treatment better than fescues. The traditional fescue/bent mixture mentioned above, however, should not really be mown that low, except occasionally for competition purposes, say.

Quite simply, it cannot be guaranteed that the resistance down to 5mm will extend beyond that point.

To answer another frequent question, browntop bent - better for resisting close mowing - is more expensive than other species because it is more difficult to produce and clean.

How does the greenkeeper makes his tees and fairways look their best in the face of serious wear and tear?

In repairing divots and renovating tees, everyone seems to understand that perennial ryegrass is necessary. But often guidance is requested as precisely how to balance the advantages of heavy-duty cultivars with the desire for a finer appearance.

Understandably, customers ask for reassurance that they can rely on good purity and germination from the products they choose.

Is it possible to mow greens under 5mm?

Is a 100% ryegrass mix ideal for fairways?

All seeds are rigorously tested for purity and germination so that they comply with the relevant statutory and voluntary standards.

Thanks to Barenbrug UK for their assistance in putting this feature together.



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