

## Winter Covers, Let's Look Again

by Roger A. Stewart, Jr., CGCS

This past winter proved to be an excellent evaluation of winter green covers used on bentgrass greens that were in various stages of establishment. The stages of development at Stonebridge ranged from greens that were about 85% established to greens that were overseeded in mid October with little or no germination prior to December 1.

As a result we were able to see the effects covers on all these situations. The most dramatic effect was on the more established turf. The covers helped increase the stand by 5-10%. That may not seem like much but on new greens it is pretty dramatic. Probably not as dramatic to the eye was the effect on the greens that were seeded later in the year around the end of September or beginning of October. These greens had some germination but were considerably thinner than those previously mentioned. The covers did a good job of protecting these very young plants from desiccating during the winter and enabled us to get those plants going this spring with a little shot of fertilizer. The greens that were seeded last in the second week of October had little or no germination before covers were applied in late November. Those greens showed no improvement with the use of covers. That just tells me that if you haven't got some growth in the fall don't waste your time and money on covers. We still have little or no germination on those same greens and it is the beginning of May. Obviously "dormant seeding" is also very suspect. I didn't believe it would work before and I don't believe it will work now. All in all I have found that with germination and some growth prior to cover application there are some very good benefits to be had.

One piece of advice I must strongly issue is the meticulous use of fungicide for snowmold protection prior to covering and the daily inspection under the covers in the spring to avoid disease problems. Disease is more prevalent under covers and fungicide application prior to covering is absolutely necessary. I didn't have a sprayer last fall so fungicide was applied with a granular carrier and every area where the overlap was insufficient or coverage was poor snowmold was a problem. Pythium can creep up on you under the covers in the early spring, especially when dealing with new seedlings and daily inspections are a necessity.

I hope some of these experiences can help you avoid some of the same problems and provide you with excellent results from the use of winter green covers.

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