

# OVERSEEDING IN SOUTH FLORIDA



Dave Bailey

Now is the time to plan your winter overseed program. With temperatures at ninety degrees daily the most current pressing problem is keeping pace with the healthy bermuda greens. Overseeding winter turf may be your last worry. Or is it? Today's superintendent must plan work programs months in advance. You need to place the order now to secure your seed selection.

Many subjects do not have a right or wrong answer. In golf course maintenance no single subject is more controversial in southern Florida than winter overseeding of putting greens. Each side is convinced their opinion is correct for their club, and there lies the key to the answer. The Club.

Just what does the club want and need? Is the seed money worth the benefit? Will the members tolerate the several weeks of putting surfaces in a transition period? Does an overseeded green give a better putting surface? Or does it just look nicer to the member here only in the winter. What speed do the players demand? How much play is the course receiving and what is the green size? The single biggest question is does your turf type need seed to stabilize the color. Most overseeding is decided on this question alone.

The area from Vero Beach to the Keys was studied along the Florida coastline twenty miles westward. Phil Gardner, regional manager of Lakeshore Equipment and Supply Company, compiled the following data. His survey covered 201 eighteen hole courses. Complexes were counted per course. The results showed 102 courses were overseeded on the putting green surfaces. The 102 total was broken down as follows:

9 Penncross Bent, 2 Emerald Bent, 2 Kentucky Bluegrass, and 89 used Rye or a Rye Blend. The rye breakdown was 31 used Pennfine, 7 Manhattan, and the remaining 51 courses used a rye blend. Medalist was the most used rye blend. Phil Gardner says, "the figures have changed from 1/3 the courses using seed to 1/2 in the last two years." He attributes this to, "The increased play of our courses, improved seed quality and the cold winters of 1977 and 1978."

Seed prices vary with the seed type but please understand the numbers game. The bent prices will range from \$6.00 to \$6.50 per pound. Four pounds per 1,000 square feet is recommended. Thus a cost of about \$25 per 1,000 square feet. The rye prices will be between 95¢ and \$1.25 per pound. With 25 pounds per 1,000 square feet recommended. The total price again comes out to about \$25 per 1,000 square feet. Remember that is the main cost. The total cost is from \$5,000 to \$10,000 per eighteen holes. Is it worth it?

Superintendents in favor get to answer first. Brad Kocher, Inverrary Country Club, says, "Overseeding is a good insurance policy to protect against potential damage to bermuda greens from the cold temperatures characteristic of the past three winters. It also protects against traffic stress during December and April." George Cavanaugh, President Country Club, overseeded one course and not the other. He says, "Old greens after seven years are harder to carry through the winter and should be overseeded. If I were rebuilding greens they would not be overseeded the first six years." Fred Dickson, Quail Ridge Golf and Tennis Club, overseeds because of club policy. He says, "After seed is applied they run the dragmat in five directions for uniform coverage. The greens mower height is raised to 5/16 for a month to let the seed become established." Dan Jones, County Club Aventura, says, "During the cold winter months overseeding gives our greens the day to day beauty and putting quality that our members demand. This cannot be achieved consistently with bermuda grass alone." Jack Cunningham, East Pointe Country Club, says, "If the club can afford the relatively small expense to overseed I think it is well worth it." Kevin Downing, Atlantis Golf Club, says, "Next year I will seed at two different times. The rye will be used first at 18 pounds per 1,000 square feet and a second seeding three weeks later with 10 pounds per 1,000 square feet but using no topdressing." Bill Cahill, Port Malabar Country Club, near Melbourne, said, "I need to overseed to

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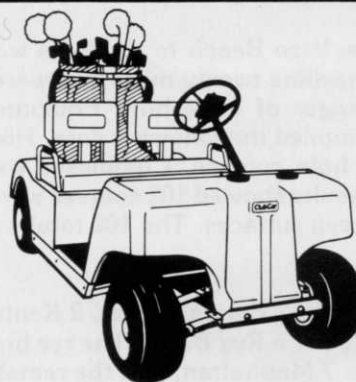
provide good color and good putting all winter season. Selective verticutting of overseeded greens can provide fast or slow greens that hold shots and putt true." Steve Basumel, Pompano Beach Golf Club, said, "Overseeding has been a life saver at our club. It provides an excellent putting surface and holds up under tremendous traffic. Medalist V Rye was used." Robert Hurst, Jupiter Island Club, says, "Overseeding to our course is a must in case of a severe winter. It gives us better color and insures a good putting surface." Paul Turcotte, Melreese Golf Course, says, "I plan to overseed in the latter part of December. This will give us a good strain of grass for the winter months of January, February, and March." Ben Auld, Vero Beach Country Club, said, "Overseeding is a must from Vero Beach northward. It is an option to the south. It's a necessary gamble with the weather, but only the superintendent that takes the pains to see that its done right will ever be successful." Carl Smith, Palm Beach Country Club, said, "I think with overseeding you will have a super quality turf of blue ribbon condition." Carl thinks every private club should overseed with bent grass and that public courses should use rye grass. Carl also points out an often overlooked simple rule. "You must have a sharp mower when cutting overseed." He uses a walk mower at all times. The first cutting will be at a 1/4 inch. The second week lowered to 3/16 inch. The fifth week 5/32 inch. And if possible be down to 1/8 inch on his Pencross bent greens. Scott Sincarbeau, Royal Palm Yacht and Country Club, summed it up best for those in favor of overseeding. He said, "Ninety percent of the golfers think the course is great if the greens are a pretty green color. Good overseeding will give them something to relate to."

Those in favor of not overseeding greens at their club are Stanley Carr, Gulf Stream Golf Club. He says, "located next to the ocean, with little play and Tifgreen 328 it is not necessary." Alan Weitzel, Dade County Golf Courses, says, "We cannot justify the expense." Paul Frank, Wilderness Country Club in Naples, summed it up best for those against overseeding. He said, "Members do not like the way overseeding disrupts the putting surface for several weeks coming in and also several weeks as it goes out. In the southern part of Florida south of a line between Fort Myers and Palm Beach the few days of extreme cold do not merit the expense and inconvenience to the golfer. Beef up with liquid fertilizer and a light touch of good dye during the few off color days." David Bailey, Atlantis Country Club, agrees with Paul Frank. Bailey says, "As a golfer I am 99% opposed to overseeding, as a turf man I am 75% opposed to overseeding, and as a photographer I am 99% in favor of overseeding." Billy Wright, Villa Delray, says, "I definitely believe overseeding is a good insurance. However if cost is a factor and the course will be played to maximum capacity overseeded or not the seed money deserves some consideration." Bill Kriegel, Lake Worth Municipal Golf Club says, "I feel that the greens properly maintained will be much better than overseeded greens. Being a municipal course with Everglades I & II greens I feel that overseeding will cause more problems than it will solve." Mike Berger, Biltmore and Granada Golf Courses, says, "We are not against overseeding but believe it does not suit our circumstances. The cost of overseeding is expensive and for us it does not warrant the short period gain. On an average our

greens will be off color between ten and fifteen days each winter from cold damage. Since the putting quality is only slightly impaired I am not in favor of overseeding." Bob Strait, Boca West Country Club, said, "We overseeded one course and not two. It is a pain to establish with extremely heavy play but contamination of foreign bermudas forces us to overseed. It may be a necessary evil." Bill Wagner, Tequesta Country Club, has not overseeded but is changing his opinion as his greens age. He said, "When you consider cost versus benefit I have seen no real need. After several cool winters and a total life of more than five years Tifdwarf must be overseeded to provide a good putting surface." Lou Oxnevad, Riviera Country Club, said, "I do not feel we need to overseed here. We did overseed our tees in November with a rye mixture."

As stated at the beginning of this article there is no correct answer for all clubs. Whichever way your club decided it takes the dedicated work of many individuals for the course to look good. And only you the golf course superintendent knows what is best for your club.

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