

Comparison of Tifdwarf & Tifgreen-328

County Extension and other advisory personnel are often asked for recommendations regarding grass selection for various uses. One of the most perplexing situations can be whether to use Tifdwarf or Tifgreen-328 bermudagrass for putting surfaces on golf greens. Following is a comparison of the two varieties, which are the best bermudagrass hybrids available for putting surfaces in Florida.

Tifdwarf bermudagrass is darker green during the normal growing season, finer textured and tolerates a lower mowing height than Tifgreen-328. Tifdwarf, thus, is capable of producing better appearance and putting quality than Tifgreen-328. Tifdwarf, however, has inferior cool weather color, is more difficult to overseed, is less vigorous (competitive), less tolerant of herbicides and more prone to thatch buildup.

Tifgreen-328 turns a pale green color during cooler winter months in South Florida, e.g. Palm Beach, Broward and Dade counties, when bermudagrass growing conditions are marginal. Excellent color can usually be maintained, except for a few weeks during the coldest part of winter, by adjusting fertilization and mowing height. Cool weather tolerance of Tifgreen-328 gives a golf course in South Florida the option of eliminating overseeding to maintain winter color where a brief period of poor color is not objectionable to the membership.

Cool weather tolerance of Tifdwarf in South Florida is inferior to Tifgreen-328. Instead of becoming pale green, Tifdwarf turns a flat, dark purple color, when viewed closeup, and is dark, dirty and withered appearing at a distance. Overseeding is necessary under such circumstances, however, Tifdwarf forms a close knit, dense sod which requires more extensive preplant preparation than Tifgreen-328 to insure successful overseeding. Both grasses must be overseeded to maintain winter color north of Orlando since they turn brown during winter months.

The University of Florida recommends that the putting surfaces, fringes and slopes of greens be planted with the same grass variety to minimize contamination and/or encroachment on putting surfaces by the fairway grass. Tifgreen-328 performs well with the previous recommendation because of its adaptability to various mowing heights, however, Tifdwarf is shorter, not as upright nor its leaf blades as large as those of Tifgreen-328. These features permit Tifdwarf to be mowed more closely than Tifgreen-328 on putting surfaces, but they are a disadvantage at higher mowing heights on fringes and slopes.

Tifdwarf's vertical growth habit is short and non uniform, which is noticeable during establishment at higher mowing heights on fringes and slopes. Growth at these heights is clumpy and interspersed with areas of depressed or flattened growth. Clumps are usually scalped and light green following mowing, whereas, depressed areas are dark green. A uniform mowing height is usually not achieved on fringes and slopes until Tifdwarf has completely established and developed a moderate thatch. Sponginess accompanying thatch buildup permits mowing equipment to sink sufficiently into the sod to produce a uniform clipped surface following mowing. This situation makes use of Tifdwarf undesirable on fringes and slopes since it does not readily 'hold' golf balls and is susceptible to scalping once it develops the sod depth necessary to achieve uniform mowing height.

Commercial planters hesitate to plant Tifdwarf on slopes of greens for aforementioned reasons but in doing so increase the susceptibility of Tifdwarf putting surfaces to encroachment and contamination by whatever grass is planted on such slopes. Ormond bermudagrass planted on slopes can completely crowd out Tifdwarf greens in which the primary putting surface eventually becomes Ormond bermudagrass with small patches of Tifdwarf contamination. Closeness of the fairway grass on slopes to putting surfaces makes it

(Continued on page 49)

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(Continued from page 48)

easy for small pieces of that grass to be scattered or blown onto putting surfaces during mowing or carried there afterward by other maintenance operations. Cleats on golfer's shoes are an excellent method for mechanically planting clipping material into putting surfaces. Eventual contamination is almost a certainty since much of the clipping material is capable of producing roots under favorable environmental conditions.

A final disadvantage of Tifdwarf is the occurrence of apparent natural mutations within otherwise pure stands of Tifdwarf. There is no way a pure stand of Tifdwarf can be guaranteed under the circumstances since there is no way of predicting the occurrence of mutations.

In summary, Tifdwarf is capable of providing a superior putting surface, however, the disadvantages of this grass make it inferior to Tifgreen-328 bermudagrass with time. ■



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