

GOLF TURF NEWS

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Too Darn Much Seed

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The operation of overseeding bermudagrass greens has been outlined by probably hundreds of turf managers, educators, consultants, and maybe dog catchers. Rates range from 15 to 60 lbs./100 sq. ft. and methods are as varied as the people who overseed. In the next few paragraphs, I want to discuss some considerations for overseeding that have proven to work best in the field and why. After reading this, ask yourself: "Why do I overseed the way I do?" If you will take an objective look at your own operation, then a better one will result.

Let's first look at overseeding preparation. Preparation is not accomplished the week before overseeding application but is a grooming process over the entire spring, summer and early fall. Light, frequent topdressing, vertical mowing, brushing and/or combining improves putting quality and keeps turf with an upright growth habit allows the seeds to filter down to the soil instead of on thatch or foliage. This type of overseeding preparation eliminates the need for rigorous scalping and/or vertical mowing immediately before overseeding. We all know how detrimental this can be to the winter hardness of the bermudagrass.

The second consideration is seeding rates. Most articles about overseeding recommend 30 plus lbs. of perennial ryegrass per 1000 sq. ft. These rates, when properly groomed and fertilized like all greens should be, produce the most uniform and true surfaces and the best putting speeds. Texture and density are excellent and, best of all, transition is much smoother in the spring. Heavy overseeding

rates are expensive, encourage disease, are more detrimental to the bermudagrass, and are more difficult to eliminate in the spring.

The lighter rates provide all of the desirable characteristics of overseeding including bermudagrass protection. The 18 to 28 lbs./1000 sq. ft. selection is based on amounts of traffic and how quickly in the fall you wish the ryegrass to become dense. These rates, when brushed and groomed with the vertical mower in the spring, produce an excellent putting surface that allows the bermudagrass to rejuvenate its growth without a tremendous cool season canopy to shade it and compete with it.

These recommendations for overseeding rates, as mentioned, are based on observations from travel over the South. Many turf managers run into serious transition problems simply because they overseed too heavily. As we all know, overseeding quality and performance is more affected by management than rates anyway.

So now, when you are objectively studying your overseeding program, ask yourself: "Why do I overseed the way I do? Can I use less seed?" In most cases, the turf managers that say they can't use less than 30 lbs./1000 sq. ft. have never tried. Don't become caught up in the popular trends of heavy overseeding rates and lesser degrees of grooming. Remember, grooming and proper overseeding rates allow golfers to putt on the ends of the grass blades and not the sides. Who wants thick, grainy putting surfaces anyway?

Overseeding has been a tremendous asset to the playability of many golf courses by providing cool season covers for dormant bermudagrass. Overseeding protects as well as beautifies the course, but don't become a turf manager that uses "too darn much seed." ■

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