

Having spent the past two and one half years managing bentgrass greens at the Isleworth Golf and Country Club, I have a different perspective of bentgrass from most of my Florida peers. There is only a handful of courses in the state that have pure stands of bentgrass maintained year round.

While I came to respect the fine playing qualities of bentgrass, I also gained an

appreciation for the difficulties of managing a cool season grass year round through three different Florida summers. Now that I have left Isleworth, I am often asked if I'm glad to be away from the

pressure of maintaining the bentgrass.

The easy answer is yes.

The reflective answer is that it was a unique experience fraught with frustrating turf losses countered by remarkable successes.

It is not reasonable for 99.9 percent of the golf courses in Florida even to consider using bentgrass except for winter overseeding. However, if a club or two out there is contemplating pure bentgrass greens as its year-round turf, then please read the following list of requirements that I feel are necessary based on my two and one half years (and three summers!) worth of bentgrass trial and tribulation.

Following this list is no guarantee for success. Remember! Growing bentgrass in Florida is somewhat akin to growing oranges in Pennsylvania. It is out of its "natural range".

But these basics are necessary to assure a reasonable chance for success:

SITE

The greens should be located in areas with excellent air circulation and sunlight.

Greens surrounded by trees, mounds, and houses will suffer on hot, humid days. Some courses have installed fans to try to counteract this "stagnant pocket" effect. At Isleworth the highly elevated, exposed greens always did better in times of stress than those down low by the water and shielded by homes or trees.

CONSTRUCTION

I highly recommend USGA Specification Greens.

Bentgrass does not tolerate excessive moisture so the consistency and drainage of the greens must be exact. Shortcuts and sloppiness in the construction of the greens will result in definite problems in the summer.

Improperly sized drain gravel, inconsistent thickness of the soil mix, incorrect sub-grade contouring, and on-site mixing of the soil were some of the construction problems that came back to haunt us during times of stress on the Isleworth greens.

IRRIGATION

A modern control system is mandatory. The old electro-mechanical controllers can be made to work, but they become labor intensive when you must constantly adjust for moisture requirements. The new computerized controls will make infinitesimal adjustments to allow for local environmental changes.

Each green should have *at least* two manual hose connectors for hand-watering isolated dry spots, and a separate mist system of small heads for quick cool-down syringing in addition to the heads necessary to water the putting surface and the slopes.

STAFFING

A qualified, professional, assistant superintendent is essential to manage bentgrass. The care and attention that it requires will burn out one manager. The staff should be able to lead a "normal" life to produce a quality product. I was at the golf course 358 days my first year until I hired a good assistant. Managing bentgrass became tolerable after that.

A Requiem for Bentgrass

Green Side Up



Joel D. Jackson

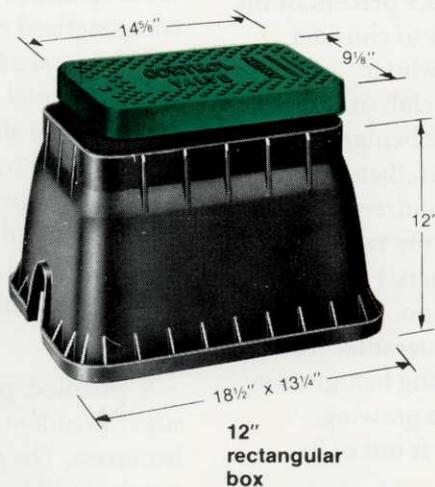
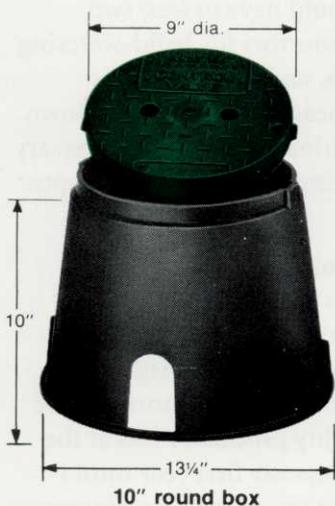
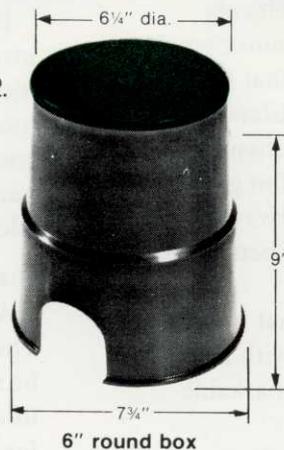
Joel D. Jackson, CGCS

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AFTERWORDS

CLUB COMMITMENT

Even with the first four items in place there will be hard times and disappointments.

Bentgrass is a cool season grass.

Hot, humid days up North tend to get balanced by cool nights. Hot humid days in Florida are followed by warm, muggy nights. Therefore, the time zone for problems with bentgrass is expanded by warm springs and falls. The club must understand that and be flexible in its demands for grooming during stressful periods. Also, the club that plans to use bentgrass should be one that has light play or no play in the summer (Augusta National, for example), and no more than 20,000 rounds per year — 15,000 is better.

The title of this piece is "A Requiem for Bentgrass." A requiem is a song, or dirge, or mass for the dead. Bentgrass has departed my life, but is still alive for others. Dan Jones, CGCS, recently tested 24 bentgrass cultivars for Dr. Milton Engleke of Texas A&M. Dan was to treat the bentgrass no differently from bermudagrass and take no unusual actions to preserve it. Dan returned eight cultivars which survived the native conditions and neglect. Dr. Engleke will continue to test and select the hardiest cultivars for possible development.

So there you have my professional opinion about bentgrass in Florida! I spoke at the 1990 Wisconsin Turfgrass Symposium about growing bentgrass in Florida, and they gave me "The Living on the Edge" award!

It is a very special grass that requires some very special conditions to be successful. If all the conditions controllable by man *are not* met, I will guarantee problems. If those conditions *are* met, I will still promise you some tough days and turf loss while trying to grow a grass variety out of its natural range.