

Overseeding Trends

Earning Your Stripes

This article was supposed to be about overseeding trends, but guess what? The trend has remained the same; most courses are still overseeding and the last 5-10 years of mild winters didn't really cause very many courses to back off their usual programs. Some courses with ultradwarf greens may have lowered their rates a little. The big news was the winter weather in 2002-03 and what it taught everyone.

The first lesson was that we had indeed become spoiled by mild winters and the severe cold weather this year exposed some chinks in preparation and management techniques. Maybe we all got a little lackadaisical since the mild winters hadn't stressed the bermudagrass very much in the last five years. This year was more typical of the 70s and 80s weather some of us veterans remember, and the pitfalls of establishment and transition were magnified for all to see.

Successful overseeding can be a crap shoot under any circumstances. Timing of seeding is a blind draw depending on Mother Nature, so there's no guarantee that going down early or late is the solution. Extended periods of rainy weather and the onset of cold weather early in the season can severely limit the quality of establishment just as much as an overly warm fall season. Here are some thoughts from your peers on this year's overseeding trials and tribulations.

Gainesville CC Overseeding Is a Year-Round Responsibility



"What you do to your greens all year affects your overseeding program."

- Buddy Keene, GCS

What you do to your greens all year long affects your overseeding program. We are always verticutting and topdressing our greens throughout the spring and summer. That



January 2003 Overseeding stripes at Deltona Hills G&CC. Photo by Joel Jackson

way when we apply our seed we do not need to go in and do any major verticutting or heavy topdressing. We also aerify at least three times annually. We apply our seed sometime between mid-to-late October. This gives us a two-three-week window in case the weather is not favorable on the first attempt.

The near-record cold winter of 2002-03 did not catch us by surprise because we watch and read all weather-related data available like the Weather Channel and the Farmer's Almanac. Laugh if you want but the Almanac is a pretty good resource. We communicate to our membership with a monthly newsletter about what to expect with the weather and how it affects turf conditions and aesthetics. Our members are well informed. They don't like surprises any more than we do. Our overseeding went very well the last couple of years so I do not anticipate changing a thing.

We use straight *Poa trivialis* on our greens at 10-12 pounds per 1,000 square feet. We do not go heavy because it may result in transition difficulties. We would rather be a little thin on the overseeding because it favors better transition in the spring. As far as the tees and fairways we go out at 400 pounds per acre with a three-way blend, that way we have different seed varieties in the mix for every environmental stress that we may encounter. We could go heavier on the rate, but we have Ormond bermuda-

grass fairways and a lot of shade. The Ormond does not come out of the cold very well especially if it has a lot of competition from the ryegrass.

The fertility program on our greens is all soluble with the spray rig, with maybe some granular during transition. We believe it is better to spray a little every week instead of a lot all at once. This method alleviates all of the peaks and valleys in the plant nutrition program. Obviously, we have to periodically adjust due to the weather and other stresses, but we pretty much keep it on an even keel. Our fairways and tees are handled a little differently from our greens. We use granular fertilizer blends and fertigation. We use soil and tissue tests to determine what to apply and go from there.

As for as our spray program for pre-emergence control, we use Barricade everywhere in the irrigated areas where we do not want tracked-off volunteer rye seed to germinate and this also controls a variety of weeds in our irrigated areas. We try to apply other pre-emergent applications well ahead of any forecast rain event in non-irrigated areas. For post-emergent control we use Manor, Kerb, Princep and others. Once our overseeded grasses are up and established we try to topdress once every three-four weeks or as needed.

Transition management can be difficult if the weather is not favorable. We do not spray out our overseeding. We let it check out on its own with very little encouragement from our



Photo 1. Old Colliers displays flags of the countries represented by staff members.

Super Tips by Darren Davis Keep Your Employees; Pay Attention to Detail

Recently I spent a few hours with my colleague Tim Hiers, golf course manager at The Old Collier Golf Club in Naples. With Tim's tenure in the profession, he has witnessed many innovations, seen countless trends in the business and is a very valuable source of information. Taking advantage of his knowledge, I challenged Tim with this question, "If you could offer only one piece of advice to a fellow Golf Course Superintendent, and he had no prior knowledge of the individual's operation or their duration in the industry, what secret to success would he offer?"

After a brief pause he responded, "Always treat people well, but even more importantly clean up your facility; a clean, organized facility will give outsiders the impression that you truly care about the investment that you are maintaining and the safety of your biggest asset, your employees."

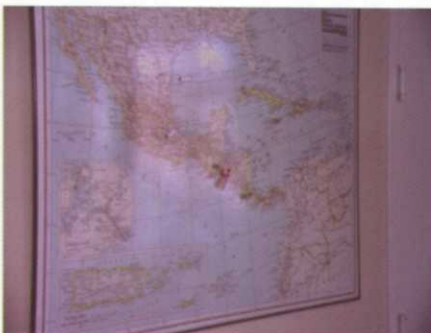


Photo 2. World Maps with pins representing employees also show the states and countries the staff hail from.

That piece of advice is the focus of this "Super Tip".

Employee Morale

Flags from around the world, representing the employee's country of origin, hang from the ceiling (Photo 1) The flags are an employee morale technique that Tim has employed to provide staff members a connection to their homeland. Tim admits that the idea is one that he had seen at other golf course facilities and he thought it was worth replicating. While some of the employees may only be temporary residents of the United States, Tim feels as long as they are in our country and employed at Old Collier, he wants these individuals to feel that they are part of an "extended family" or the "team at Old Collier". Tim added, "It is also a way to bring home into work and create a conversation piece among employees." This was also the motivation for mounting several large scale maps on the wall of the equipment storage



Photo 3. Pegboard wall covering in the shop helps deaden sound and keep items neatly organized and stored.

area where he has labeled the "home" of each employee (Photo 2).

Pegboard

In the equipment repair area at Old Collier, peg board has been affixed to the walls (Photo 3). The first impact that the peg board had on my impression in the area was aesthetics. The area took on an organized "warehouse type" look, which is atypical of what I have seen at many other golf course facilities. The pegboard was also functional as hooks can be installed to hang and organize tools and other items. A third benefit is that the pegboard serves as a good sound absorber by buffering noise echoed from the building's metal walls and concrete floors.

Equipment Storage

In the equipment storage area, after each piece of equipment has been cleaned and put away for the night, all of the seats, beds and cowlings are raised to increase drying potential (Photo 4). Tim commented, "It is common sense that when you combine moisture and metal for an extended period of time rust becomes an issue." Ceiling fans are connected to a timer switch that turns the fans on from 6 pm to 10 pm each night to improve the drying process to protect the equipment.



Photo 4. Opening up beds and cowlings helps equipment to dry quickly and completely to help prevent corrosion.

end. This is because our bermudagrass does not come out of the cool weather very well primarily due to our nematode populations and shade. We keep the overseeding as long as possible without impeding the growth of the bermudagrass. We do lower the height of cut gradually, and brush, verti-groom and vertical mow, but we have never used any herbicides to take out our overseeding. We also do a lot of hand watering of the hot spots to prevent premature thinning before the bermudagrass is actively growing.

Buddy Keene

Southwest Florida Weather is the Wild Card in Game Of Overseeding



"It was the coldest, wettest, busiest winter with the quickest spring warm up we've ever had."

- Stuart Taylor, GCS

Transition woes this spring had Stuart Taylor

of the Riverwood GC in Port Charlotte scratching his head in disbelief. Says Taylor, "We used the same cultural practices we have used successfully the past five years and we used the same Poa trivialis (75 percent) and bentgrass (25 percent) blend that we used and liked last year."

So what was the difference?

"There was an immense difference in the weather this year. We have been averaging 10 frosts a year the last few years. This year we had 30 frosts. The winter was wetter.

Riverwood Overseeding Practices

Preparation

- Verticut greens 3 ways.
- Verticut tees and fairways 2 ways
- Scalp roughs

Seeding Rates

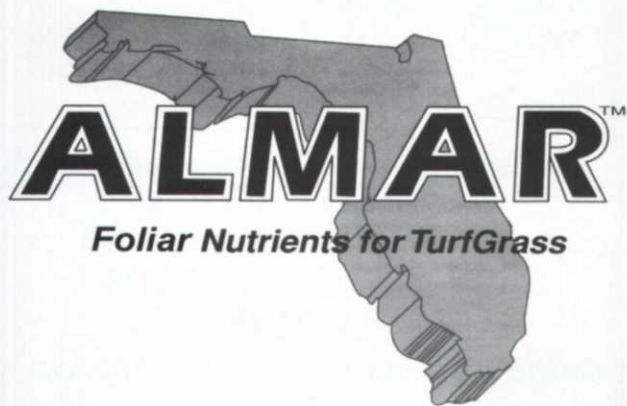
- Greens 8 lbs/M Poa trivialis/bentgrass blend (75%/25%)
- Tees 400 lbs/A; Fairways 320 lbs/A; Roughs 210 lbs/A

We had 25 inches more rainfall than normal, and we had more traffic than ever as we experienced our busiest winter season ever with around 240 rounds a day. It didn't get much better going into spring. We had frost on April 1st and seven days later it was 85 degrees. The grass didn't know whether to come or go. It was very difficult to manage since the conditions were so atypical and changeable"

The transition frustration for Taylor was magnified by the fact that he felt like he had a great overseeding establishment. "Everything looked great in the fall. The seed went down smoothly, germinated and grew in. For nine months beginning in September, we had the best greens we've ever had, and then for 30 days beginning in May we've had the worst greens in five years. They are coming around now.

"We are on the frost line on the west coast. Thirty miles south and maybe overseeding could be optional, but we are also a development course so aesthetics are a critical issue year round for real estate sales and member satisfaction. So, overseeding is not optional. The trade-off is the members are kept informed and we brought in the USGA to also help explain transition problems."

"Some of our worst areas were on



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greens that came back with the best soil tests. Some of the thin areas were problematic since they were on shady greens to begin with. Others thin spots tended to occur in hydrophobic areas. To address this we are going to aerify with 3/4" hollow tines and topdress with a sand and Profile mix for more uniform moisture control along with a program of using Cascade and other wetting agent materials."

Stuart Taylor

Central-Northeast Programs Haven't Responded to Milder Winters



*"This year reminded me of the winters of the 70s and 80s."
- Butch Singo, Harrell's, Inc.*

Butch Singo is a sales representative for the Harrell's Fertilizer Company, and his territory runs from Kissimmee to

Jacksonville. I asked Butch his take on this year's overseeding challenges.

"Overseeding programs have not changed much in my territory in response to the mild winters," he said. "As usual, some courses experienced rougher transitions than others. Most of my customers know that the weather can be unpredictable and cause havoc to playing conditions in the winter without the insurance of overseeding."

"Successful establishment was very weather dependent as usual. Those who tended to go early in the fall had better luck than those who were scheduled later and got caught when the rainy weather hit and washed a lot of seed away. Mild weather early belied the density of the overseeding and when the severe cold weather hit and the bermudagrass went dormant, people found out much or how little seed they really had established."

This year really reminded me of the winters I experienced as a superintendent in the 70s and 80s when we would typically have 20-30 frosts a year. A lot of superintendents and golfers haven't seen those kinds of winters in a long time and golfers often have short memories. Now since the second week in May, we've had high temperatures and low humidity, causing the overseeding to check

out too quickly and everyone is scrambling to push the bermudagrass to fill in as quickly as possible."

Butch Singo

West-Northwest Down Time is Nice; Preparation is Real Key To Success



"Preparation is the key to success."

- John Cunningham, GCS

John Cunningham, GCS at Black Diamond Ranch in Lecanto had the luxury of closing his course for two weeks to prepare and

overseed his courses. Black Diamond isn't the only club to recognize the importance of providing proper agronomic conditions to manage the turf, but it is rare. Some public-access courses and resorts simply can't shut down for more than a day or two, but clubs need to take a hard look at short-term convenience versus

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long-term success.

Cunningham reports that he had a good year and did not experience the problems some courses faced this year. He beat the rainy weather by getting the seed down in the second week of October and he had those two weeks to manage the seedlings properly so that he maximized their establishment.

Cunningham says, "I know we are fortunate to have the down time, but preparation is the key to success. We verticut the greens two ways and lowered the height of cut slightly to enhance seed-to-soil contact. After spreading the seed we dragged it in with a carpet drag and top-dressed heavily. I feel the heavier topdressing helps to trap the moisture and prevent the seed from drying out. With the closed time, we are able to properly irrigate and syringe to maximize germination without interfering with play."

"We only apply 8 pounds total of *Poa trivialis*. You can always add, but you can't subtract. It's more of an inter-seeding than overseeding. We contract out seeding of the fairways. I know for budgetary reasons many clubs do things in-house. We just feel that as part of a thorough preparation for the busy winter season, we want to maximize success

"I feel more comfortable with a contractor on a new tractor with a computerized spreader who does this every day, than one of our operators who may only do this once a year if we're lucky. At 400 pounds per acre, I don't want skips, misses and big overlaps which wastes money and seed and can cause transition misery if over applied in the shady roughs."

"I believe in the old saying, 'As you go in, so you come out', so we always try to manage the base bermudagrass first. If the bermudagrass is healthy and prepared properly it will survive and remain playable no matter what happens to the seed. We bump up our potassium levels to help with cold hardiness and we solid-tine aerify high traffic areas in January before they wear out. We don't wait for a problem to become visible, and then it's too late. We all know where these areas are on

our courses, so why wait? Stay ahead of the curve and prevent a problem before it happens."

"Transition has gone smoothly also. We haven't used any herbicides to take out the overseeding. The greens were seeded lightly enough that light verticutting, a lower height of cut and the warmer weather have taken out the *Poa trivialis* without any problems. The fairways are also transitioning smoothly with just a slight lowering of the height of cut."

John Cunningham

Southeast Too Much Seed Can Be as Harmful As Too Little



"My rule of thumb is to go with what's growing."

- Paul Crawford, CGCS

Paul Crawford, CGCS, the 23-year veteran at the Palm Beach Country Club, hasn't altered his program very much at all over the years. While some may think overseeding this far south is overkill, Crawford says winters like 2002-03 show why he still overseeds to protect the turf and maintain good playing conditions in the always-unpredictable Florida winters.

Crawford says, "Every once in awhile, when we get a string of mild winters people begin to talk about backing off their seeding programs to save a few bucks, and then winters like this come along and they provide a big reality check. People are seeing purple and brown bermudagrass for the first time in a long time. I think overseeding is a pretty cheap insurance policy to guarantee good turf in the winter.

"I subscribe to John Foy's theory of

overseeding for south Florida, and that's inter-seeding not overseeding. We apply a blend of 3 lbs of Pennlinks bentgrass and 3 lbs of *Poa trivialis* at a rate of 6 lbs per 1,000 sq. ft. to our greens. One time. No repeated dusting applications at 2 lbs/1,000 sq. ft. as some folks do. I think most transition problems are caused by too much seed and not too little. In our fairways and roughs we apply 300 lbs/acre.

"I will qualify that by saying you really should have a checklist that tells you what type of club and golfers do you have and what do they want? Some just want fast greens and to heck with the color. Other clubs may want a park with beautiful stripes. Depending on your club and your budget, you will then have to apply different techniques to produce what is desired. Grass selection is important also. Some tolerate heat more than others. It all depends on what you are looking to accomplish and when.

"My rule of thumb is to go with what's growing. If it turns out to be a mild winter, the bermuda may take over. That's fine. Just let it go. Our preparations for seeding are pretty tame. We verticut the greens lightly and do nothing to the fairways before seeding. We take two days to do the front nine and two for the back nine. We open on Friday. It seems to me that the courses having problems in transition tended to go heavy on the seed rates.

"When spring comes early as it often does in south Florida, keep in mind we are managing very immature plants. They are at best only five months old by the time transition comes along. That's when superintendents walk a fine line with hot days and still cool nights. We have to be very vigilant and syringe and hand-water as needed to avoid losing the overseeding too quickly. Once the soil temperatures are up, then it's time to favor the bermudagrass with verticutting and fertility. You can never go by the calendar with overseeding. It's all visual and a feel for what's happening.

Paul Crawford, CGCS

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