

Dakota Peat

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growth after eight weeks... And it is really good in low water-use areas because it holds moisture so well.

"Their maintenance costs are one-tenth what they used to be."

Dixon performed extensive tests comparing North Dakota reed-sedge peat with a Canadian sphagnum peat, a rice-hull compost and a fir bark product from California — all of which are frequently submitted to soil labs for evaluation.

He said reed-sedge peat had the only carbon-to-nitrogen (C:N) ratio (23:1, dry weight basis) that would not tie up nitrogen.

"It was the most decomposed

and also had the highest cation exchange capacity and humic acid content," he said, adding the ratios were 65:1 for Canadian sphagnum, 80:1 for rice hulls and 100:1 for fir bark.

"Dakota really falls in with 'peat humus' rather than 'reed-sedge,'" Dixon said.

Dixon found that "all the mixes met the USGA (U.S. Golf Association) criteria for water holding and decreased bulk density. Based on the C:N ratio and total carbon content, the rice hull compost does not fit USGA criteria. The fir bark product contains a better total carbon content but has a high C:N ratio.

"The lowest infiltration rate, still

almost 20 inches per hour, was a 10-percent reed-sedge peat and 90-percent sand. It is interesting to note this mix had a better infiltration rate and water-holding capacity at a 10-percent volume than the other amendments at a 20-percent volume."

Tom Briddle, director of marketing for Tectonic, Inc., of Denver, has used the Dakota reed-sedge since he ran a test on it five years ago and "was amazed at the results."

He said, "The greens we have built with the reed-sedge peat are far superior to any of the greens we did with the others."

Briddle described Dakota as an

older peat that is further decomposed, "and it mixes to the consistency that every single grain of sand has a little grain of peat clinging to it. We run it through a mechanical mixer and I would categorize that 100 percent of our sand has a little grain of peat clinging to it... The closest you could come is with an amalgamated mix of sphagnum, which runs 60-40.

He said soil laboratories that have received samples of Dakota have sometimes claimed the bag was hand-mixed.

"We did the Denver Broncos training facility, which consisted of 15,000 cubic yards of root-zone mix, and we were within plus-or-minus 1

percent throughout the entire project. There's not a soul in the sand business in the entire U.S. that can do that," Briddle said.

"We have a bentgrass nursery. The guy from USGA looked at my turf and wanted to know where I got it. He didn't believe it was reed-sedge."

Briddle estimated the cost of peat for a normal 18-hole course between \$25,000 and \$50,000.

"The cost involved in a new golf course in building new greens — one with inferior peat and one with top-grade peat — is almost equal. It doesn't cost that much more to do a top-notch one. But it costs 10 times more to redo them," he said.

With others in the industry raving about his product, Mike Pierce is a happy man.

The president of Pioneer Peat of Mesa, Ariz., and Grand Forks, N.D., which produces Dakota Peat, Pierce agreed he is blessed to have a unique deposit of peat in North Dakota that is unlike any other, except one in Russia.

He added that his material's success is also partly due to his processing, which has also been cited with outputting a "clean" product minus twigs and other debris.

Pioneer unveiling three blenders

Pioneer Peat, Inc. President Mike Pierce has announced that his company is manufacturing two models of compact soil blenders, and is designing a third, that will sell for a fraction of the cost of others on the market and make it possible for golf courses and other facilities to buy their own machines.

"These will make blending more affordable," Dixon said. "They are designed for any contractor or sand company that needs to blend. And the baby blender that we're working on, which we hope to have at the (GCSAA) Las Vegas show, will be sized and priced so every golf course or sports turf facility can have its own, just like mowers."

The larger models are the two-hopper "Dakota 2200" and three-hopper "Dakota 3200."

Pierce said 90 percent of all mixing jobs use one type of sand and one other material. The 2200 model — measuring 8-1/2 feet wide by 20 feet long and 10 feet high and selling in the \$33,000 range — has two hoppers and its own stacker. It can be hauled behind a pickup truck and is powered from a tractor's PTO.

The 3200, measuring 17 feet long, has three hoppers and its own payloader. It can be hauled with a trailer and is powered by a truck's hydraulic unit.

The 1200 "baby" will probably measure around eight feet long by five feet wide and high and cost around \$8,000, Pierce said.

Pierce, whose firm has headquarters in Grand Forks, N.D., and Mesa, Ariz., said the biggest complaint he hears is that "certain golf courses want a mix (of sand and peat) that's not available in their area. With their own blender, they can buy small portions of the materials they want when they're available and do the blending themselves."

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