

Overseeding booms in California, Southeast

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"Now, the practice has boomed in the Southeast, and California is overseeding fairways."

Competition for winter golfers is increasing, and "snowbirds" have come to expect lush, green courses. Once overseeding eases peer pressure from the competition, though, another kind of pressure takes over — turf seedling disease.

Even with all the advances in modern technology, superintendents cannot control the one factor most responsible for disease in overseeded turf: weather.

In fact, during overseeding, the two factors most responsible for Pythium blight and similar diseases become prevalent: heat and moisture. Frequent irrigation is necessary to establish turf, and in many Southern locales — even during fall and winter — high temperatures are common.

"You can't let the seedbed dry out," said Chuck Rogers, director of grounds at Saddlebrook Resort in Wesley Chapel, Fla. "But keeping it wet opens you up to a lot of problems."

Rogers minimizes the disruptions caused by overseeding by taking all the necessary precautions.

"We close the course for two or three days during overseeding, and we use good fungicides to safeguard our seed," he said. "That cost doesn't compare to what closing the course a second time would cost."

Rogers uses only treated seed, and then applies a systemic fungicide. "Young seedlings are very susceptible to pythium," he added. "The spray schedule we follow gives them a better chance."

Dr. Phillip Colbaugh, associate professor of plant pathology at Texas A&M University, recommends that people who are overseeding use seed treated with fungicides.

"Planting at any time of year is conducive to pythium because there's lots of moisture," he said. "Using treated seed and a systemic fungicide can protect the seedlings until their roots are better established."

Colbaugh added that seedling disease is always present in the soil. Its effect on turf depends on moisture, temperature and the resiliency of the roots.

"The soft tissue found in newly established seedlings has no natural defense mechanisms," said Colbaugh. "Superintendents need to recognize this so they can plan a good program."

In a recent study, Colbaugh compared untreated seed with seed treated with a fungicide combination. Results showed that average stand counts were 20 to 95 percent higher with the treated seed, and the incidence of infection was signifi-

cantly reduced.

Root development is one of the most important elements when establishing new turf. A strong root system gives young plants an extra edge as they compete for survival.

There is no sure-fire method for promoting growth, but certain fungicides can aid in seedling development two ways: protecting against disease, and promoting faster root growth.

According to Dr. Doug Houseworth, manager of techni-

cal support for Ciba-Geigy Turf and Ornamental Products, timing is critical for the effectiveness of herbicides on cool-season grasses. "Establishment is best enhanced when the product is applied at the two-to three-leaf stage," he said.

Rooting — along with seedling disease — are facets of overseeded turf that can't be ignored. While superintendents cannot control Mother Nature, they can control disease and root establishment.

Certification for lawn care pros

Standards for certification of natural organic lawn care professionals in the Northeastern United States have been set.

It's the first effort by the Natural Organic Lawn Care Standards and Certification Committee to codify in the United States minimum standards of natural lawn care by professionals seeking to limit lawn care practice to a strict, ecological program.

These standards will be

the basis for certifying professional natural organic lawn practitioners engaged in contract service work in the public and private sectors in the northeastern U.S. and southern Canada.

For additional information, contact Mary Owen, turf program coordinator, University of Massachusetts Cooperative Extension System, 812 Millbury St., Worcester, Mass. 01607; or call 508-831-1225.

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