

Nobody's ever happy during overseeding time — 'even your dog'

By MARK LESLIE

When a superintendent over-seeds, "your wife's unhappy, your dog's unhappy, your crew's unhappy, the members are unhappy — everybody's unhappy," says Tim Hiers.

"If I can tell you one thing, it's this: There are few people who look forward to overseeding," said the golf course manager at Collier's Reserve in Naples, Fla.

"It's probably the most stressful thing a superintendent has to

do," said Steve Tubbs who, as vice president of Turf Merchants in Tangent, Ore., hears from — and commiserates with — many greenkeepers around the country.

Speaking of Northern superintendents, Stubbs said: "He has to time it so he hits the overseeding just when the Bermudagrass is about to go off-color.

"If he's too early, the [overseeded] grass might come up and fight the Bermuda. Or if the heat comes back, the Ber-

muda stays active. If it cools too quick, they're in trouble. Every green needs soil temps to germinate.

"Superintendents have to do it under playing conditions. They have to blow it on. And members want it up immediately."

Overseeding in the South, said Turf Seed Marketing Manager Tom Stanley, is "critical to superintendents. Most of their play takes place in the wintertime and they need to have those courses looking crisp and green

to attract golfers. A lot of that play in Arizona and Southern California is very expensive, and if they don't overseed they're shot out of the water because nobody wants to golf on brown fairways — especially if they're playing for big bucks."



Tom Stanley

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Turf Seed

Overseeding business: High-volume but low-margin

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half of perennial ryegrass, is used for overseeding, according to Tubbs, who estimated annual use at 15 million pounds in California's Palm Springs area, 15 million in Florida, 10 million in Arizona, and 4 million to 5 million in Texas.

But, he added: "You're talking high-volume, low-dollar, very low-profit, very low-margin. This year we'll be lucky to make 10 percent on the perennial ryegrass overseeding business..."

"You sell rye for 60 to 70 cents a pound. We pay farmers 42 cents per pound. Add royalties and freight, and there's not much profit there."

Despite the low profits, most seed companies have varieties in the marketplace. About three dozen firms entered 123 varieties in the latest National Turfgrass Evaluation Program tests (See chart, page 16). Most of those varieties are available from dealers.

"When color and texture are achieved in any number of varieties, you're down to selling service, or quality, or personalities," Tubbs said. "We try to come up with different things like the best creeping bentgrass for over-seeding, the best poa trivialis [rough bluegrass]..."

"It's come to the point that your ability to get new business is predicated on your ability to produce poa trivialis."

More attention has been paid in the last five to seven years to developing poa trivialis than at any other time, Tubbs said.

Oregon State University reports more than 3,000 acres of poa trivialis in production in Oregon this year. "That's probably triple the numbers of five to seven years ago," Tubbs said.

Poa trivialis sells for a more substantial (than ryegrass) \$2.25 to \$2.50 per pound but less than its partner in a popular overseeding mix, bentgrass. Bentgrass sells for around \$7.50 a pound, and coated bent (which doubles the volume) for about \$3.50 a pound.

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