

From out of the past, Velvet bentgrass about to re-emerge in golf

By MARK LESLIE

The bentgrass "that television golfer" is making a comeback.

Thanks to Seed Research of Oregon, the seeded-type Velvet bentgrass, first developed by Dr. Richard Skogley at the University of Rhode Island, will reappear with an improved, darker green color and more stress tolerance than its predecessor, Kingston.

Called SR7200 this new Velvet will only be available for small sales or samples this year, said Research Director Dr. Leah Brilman. "We

will start in areas where people know how to manage it and have been waiting for it — then add more locations and expand the market."

Superintendents, especially in the Northeast, are anxious for the reappearance of the grass that was not dark enough for the eye of television.

Seed Research Marketing Director Skip Lynch feels Velvet fell out of favor with the advent of television, which showed greens committee members everywhere

the dark-green bents at such courses as Augusta National.

"But, the best stands of Velvet are the best putting surfaces in the world. They're smooth. They're fast," Lynch said. "They tend not to be as dark green [as other bentgrasses]."

Along with its darker color, SR7200 also possesses a major attribute of Velvets: low fertility requirements.

Velvet uses one-quarter to one-eighth the amount of fertilizer as other bents, Lynch said. Indeed,

it can burn out at higher nitrogen levels.

"Adaptability will be the issue," he said. "Many of the superintendents in Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine know how to grow Velvet. But in northern Michigan, Ontario, Minnesota, British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, Montana, Idaho — places where they could grow it — many superintendents don't know how. And that's going to be the fear."

Seed Research will have to put an educational process in place "to make it happen," he said.

SR7200 is not entered in the national test plots because it takes such different management than creeping types.

"If they are managing the tests for creepers, very often Velvet won't look so good," Brilman said. "Velvet takes much less fertility than creepers. High fertility makes it thatch up, get disease easy and, essentially, will kill it."

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Paint may help some

Golf course superintendents all want their courses in top playing condition with uniformly green color the entire year. Specialty turf paints have become increasingly popular for superintendents who require instant green color on their turf.

Turf paints are not new. But recent improvements in quality, durability and economics have made their use more consistent and reliable. Normally, one application of turf paint made just as the grass begins to go dormant will provide color through the entire winter.

Green Lawnger from the Becker-Underwood company and LESCO Green, by the LESCO company, are used on numerous courses.

The cost is normally less than ryegrass overseeding. Ryegrass will require watering, sunlight, and additional nutrients to germinate and grow. Also, ryegrass occasionally grows into a more uneven surface.

Agronomically, turf paints are not harmful to the turf, as they are specially developed colored latex coatings. Certain additives to common greenhouse paint make it an undesirable substitute. A quality turf paint should be made specifically to allow water and air to pass freely through the color coating and not affect the turf vigor. A superior turf paint should also bond onto the grass itself and not wear or rub off onto clothing or skin.

Once a turf paint is selected, proper application of the material is the key. First, the applicator should cut the turf to the desired height so the product is applied to a uniform surface. A hand-spray gun or hand-boom sprayer should be used so the application is evenly applied. For best results, make two applications: the second perpendicular angle to the first, to eliminate possible streaking. Avoid accidental application to fences, brick, or concrete, as the color is permanent once dried.

Typically, rates of 1 part turf paint to 15 parts water are used on partially dormant or slightly off-colored turf. Condition of the turf will determine actual use rates.

A quality turf paint should also be versatile enough for divot mix applications.