

# On The Green

## A *Poa annua* nursery: Who'd have thunk it?

By JOHN GASPER

The importance of a putting green nursery to a golf course maintenance operation can not be underestimated — acting to maintain the integrity of the greens. A quality turf nursery can be beneficial in many ways. It can be used to enlarge green surfaces or repair damage from vandalism, sabotage and oil leaks. It can also allow the superintendent to plug or sod turf areas that have been lost due to disease, insects, or winter damage.

The challenge confronting superintendents is how to produce a putting green turf nursery that will acclimate to the course's many microclimates. At The Ridgewood Country Club, we faced an additional dilemma. Built in 1927 in the chestnut and oak forests of northern New Jersey, the course is characterized by its natural terrain and tree-lined fairways. The down side is that the many trees have allowed encroachment of annual bluegrass. In fact, *Poa annua* is the predominant grass species on the course. The lack of sunlight and air circulation makes it very difficult to establish bentgrass into the greens. Most greens are 65 to 95 percent annual bluegrass.

The problem we have encountered is that bentgrass turf from our nursery did not perform well on most green surfaces. Bentgrass plugs would thin out and become unsightly and inconsistent. From this experience, our goal was to produce a nursery turf that would survive on our putting greens. Our first thought was to take annual bluegrass from fairway areas and

*John J. Gasper in superintendent at The Ridgewood Country Club in Paramus, N.J.*



Ridgewood Country Club's nursery — composed of 75 percent *Poa annua* and 25 percent bentgrass — two months after establishment.

gradually mow it down to green height. This was not effective.

We finally decided to use our aerification plugs (*Poa*) from our greens to establish the nursery. This method was advantageous in that the same annual bluegrass strain and soil type would be present in the nursery as existed on the greens. The challenge was how to create a dense annual bluegrass stand from the plugs. After much experimentation, we found our answer.

First, prepare the site through rototilling and leveling. It is important to control any weed infestations, especially those that cannot be selectively removed once the turf is established.

Second, apply aerification plugs to the nursery site. The key here is to apply enough material so that an adequate root zone is present. We have found that 4 to 6 inches is optimum. This also allows for uniformity in soil type after the sod is cut. Also important is not to allow plugs to sit for an extended period of time. The sooner the plugs are spread out, the better. A conventional top dresser is employed for this application.

Next, seed bentgrass over the plugs at 1/4 to 1/3 pound per thousand square feet. This helps fill the voids between the annual bluegrass plugs.

Finally, roll and top dress the nursery. Top dressing is only applied so that the bentgrass seedlings are covered. Too heavy an application of top dressing will reduce the survival

rate of the annual bluegrass.

Once established, it is critical that the nursery be kept on the same maintenance program as the putting greens. Any deviation will result in a longer acclimation period once used. With this method, a 75:25 percent *Poa*/bentgrass blend will be produced that will adapt to any microclimate on the golf course.

Another suggestion is to aerify during seed-head production and mow without baskets during the seed-head period. This will help increase annual bluegrass seed-bank population. Also, using ammoniated sulfate fertilizers will reduce the incidence of summer patch.

The idea of producing an annual bluegrass nursery for use on a golf course sounds bizarre. But with the intense tree competition and low mowing heights, it is impossible to substantially increase our bentgrass populations. Many greens at Ridgewood are not conducive to bentgrass survival.

Why not just remove some trees from the golf course? The trees at Ridgewood are like no others. That would be similar to removing the "church pews" from Oakmont or the "road hole" from St. Andrews. Not on my watch.

In the meantime, we have found an excellent method of creating a putting green nursery. In fact, other superintendents in the area have used it and have had good results. Our next step is to only cultivate the "most fit" annual bluegrass biotypes as to environmental stresses. The results will be upcoming.

### SANDOZ DISTRIBUTORS 1- 800-435-TURF (8873)

AG RESOURCES, INC.  
Brandon, FL

AGRA TURF  
Searcy, AR

AGRITURF  
Hatfield, MA

BENHAM CHEMICAL COMPANY  
Farmington Hills, MI

CANNON TURF  
Fishers, IN

CORNBELT CHEMICAL  
McCook, NE

ESTES, INC.  
Wichita Falls, TX

FISHER AND SON, INC.  
Malvern, PA

E.H. GRIFFITH, INC.  
Pittsburgh, PA

GEORGE W. HILL & CO., INC.  
Florence, KY

GRASS ROOTS  
Mt. Freedom, NJ

HOWARD JOHNSON'S ENTERPRISES  
Milwaukee, WI

KNOX FERTILIZER  
Knox, IN

LEBANON TURF PRODUCTS  
Lebanon, PA

PENNINGTON ENTERPRISES, INC.  
Madison, GA

PRO SEED TURF SUPPLY  
Chantilly, VA

PROFESSIONAL TURF SPECIALTIES, INC.  
Champaign, IL

REGAL CHEMICAL COMPANY  
Alpharetta, GA

THE ANDERSONS  
Maumee, OH

TURF INDUSTRIES, INC.  
Houston, TX

TURF PRODUCTS LTD., INC.  
West Chicago, IL

TURF SUPPLY COMPANY  
Eagan, MN

UNITED HORTICULTURAL SUPPLY  
Salem, OR

VIGORO INDUSTRIES  
Winter Haven, FL

WILBUR-ELLIS COMPANY  
Kent, WA

## Accurate Top Dressing With Wet Material. Amazing!



Top dress 18 greens in less than 4 hours.



Patented chevron belt design



Eliminates shovel loading



Precise on/off application

Turfco's patented belt uniformly and accurately spreads top dressing with all levels of moisture content. You can top dress with wet or dry material, from a light mist to a heavy application with the same Turfco spreader. Its 6 ground driven wheels give you a lower PSI than walking top dressers. They also eliminate hydraulics so you never have to worry about oil leaks on your greens. With just one operator, you can load the 22.5 cubic hopper and top dress 18 greens in only 3 to 4 hours. Amazing top dressers since 1961.

To demo our newest model call 612-785-1000.



Turfco Manufacturing Inc., 1655 101st Avenue Northeast  
Minneapolis, MN 55449-4420, (612) 785-1000 Fax (612) 785-0556