

A worker lays out rolls of hybrid bermudagrass sod at the Vintage Club in Palm Springs, Calif. The Vintage club recently underwent a successful conversion from bentgrass to bermudagrass on its greens.



Desert courses switch to bermuda

PALM DESERT, Calif. — Following the latest trend in prestigious desert-area golf courses, the Vintage Club and the Palmer Course at PGA West in La Quinta, Calif., have sodded their greens with West Coast "old line" Tifdwarf hybrid bermuda.

At the Vintage in Palm Desert, one of two existing courses was converted from bentgrass to bermuda. More than 100,000 square feet of bermuda sod was installed by West Coast Turf.

PGA West chose Tifdwarf hybrid bermuda sod for the greens

at the Palmer Private, replacing bentgrass greens as well. West Coast Turf was again the supplier.

"We are seeing this trend particularly in the desert areas because bentgrass is a cool-season grass, and historically it suffers during the extreme summers. Tifdwarf survives beautifully through the summer," explained West Coast's Joe Foster.

"Bentgrass is expensive to maintain and requires more chemicals to stay alive in the summer than bermudagrass, and Tifdwarf hybrid bermuda greens can play just as well as bentgrass greens when properly maintained."

Virgil Robinson, director of agronomy for KSL's eight PGA West and LaQuinta layouts, said members at the Palmer course have been very positive about the conversion. "We shut down the course for six weeks right after Memorial Day," Robinson said. "We stripped out the old bentgrass, added some organic amendments and resodded with bermuda. We've been back in play since mid-July and the greens are in great shape."

"The Palmer course has more forgiving greens than some of our other courses. Since it's harder to hold the ball on bermuda, the Palmer course could better afford the conversion to bermuda than our other courses."

Robinson said bentgrass can thrive in Palm Springs, although it does better in windy areas along Interstate 10 than it does on courses that back up against the mountains thus restricting air movement. The key to growing healthy bentgrass in the desert is a proper green subgrade that percs in the six-to-10-inch-per-hour range rather than the half-inch-per-hour, fine-graded, blow-sand greens commonly found in Palm Springs.

"Bermuda will grow in spite of that [low perc rates]," said Robinson.

Another reason to resod with bermuda rather than re-establish bentgrass is expense, Robinson added. Resodding 18 greens with bermuda costs about \$100,000, compared to the \$800,000 price tag to rebuild 18 greens to re-establish bentgrass, he added.

Vintage superintendent Douglas Anderson was pleased with the results of his bermudagrass conversion. "We are in the off-season right now," he said in late September, "so the real test will be in December, January and February when we will get our member feedback. I have had nothing but a positive experience with the transformation, and I am anticipating a positive reaction from our members as well."

Other desert clubs that have planted bermuda include The Quarry in La Quinta, Calif., Desert Falls in Palm Desert, Calif., McCormick Ranch in Scottsdale, Ariz., the Raven at South Mountain in Phoenix, Ariz., and the 49'r Club in Tucson, Ariz.

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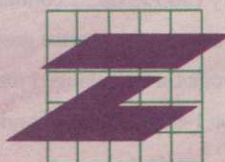
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