

Bluegrass comeback

Continued from page 35

fungi on ryegrass. Add to this, sharp price increases for ryegrass the last two years.

From his test trials, Prof. Bill Torello of the University of Massachusetts is reportedly "sold on moving back to bluegrasses with new types of bluegrasses," said Brede following a field day.

The older-type bluegrasses, when cut short, "got diseases you just wouldn't believe," said Brede. "They would increase a thousandfold with disease... The new types, when cut close, respond just as they do when they're taller, with nearly perfect disease resistance.

"We couldn't even suggest this [fairway use] if they didn't have that resistance at this low cut."

Agreeing to the claims of lower-cut bluegrasses, Morris said: "It used to be that people would not recommend less than 3/4-inch mowing height for Kentucky bluegrass, and not many would tolerate that height. Now there are a number that can be mowed at 1/2 inch, which puts them in the fairway category. And you'd be surprised at the density of some of these."

But Lehman cautioned: "Industrywide, there are promising new varieties that tolerate low mowing heights, especially relative to fairways. Underline 'promising.' We're trying to make great strides, but progress is much slower in blues because of their reproductive behavior: They are apomixis, meaning that every seed has the same maternal constitution except in rare deliberate crosses."

At Lofts, researchers are excited about progress with varieties that will take low mowing heights and are very dense and aggressive. "Hopefully, with good seed yields, we can make it more readily available," Dr. Lehman said. "We have limited release this year, and will have more material next year.

"With bluegrasses, there is also an emphasis toward more heat-tolerance as well as disease-resistance ... and we are working on winter-fall color retention versus early-spring green-up — two traits that may not be the same in a variety."

"I see greater strides ahead," Jacklin's Brede said. "But the varieties coming out this summer are great. I think these ones people could jump in with and have very successful close-cut fairways."

How far south can these bluegrasses be grown?

"Practically, bluegrass fairways are suitable down to the Mason-Dixon line," Brede said. "They could be used in mixtures with perennial rye a couple hundred miles south of that. I see a natural match in that warmer zone. Ryes are susceptible to

gray leaf spot in that region, so it's knocking them all out and it's expensive to treat chemically. But bluegrass has good immunity for it [gray leaf spot]."

"I've had more and more calls about mixing the two," said NTEP's Morris.

So, what are the negatives to the new breed of blues? Researchers agree that since it is a small seeded grass it is more difficult to get established than a ryegrass.

And time may be a factor as many superintendents will wait for university researchers to show the way with real-life results, positive or negative.

As Dave Oatis said from his Northeast Region headquarters: "People are speculating about using newer [bluegrass] cultivars on fairways. In the Great Plains and Colorado it's a viable choice. But in this climate, I wouldn't be a guinea pig at this point."

NTEP TRIALS TO YIELD MORE SPECIFIC FINDINGS

BELTSVILLE, Md. — The National Turfgrass Evaluation Program (NTEP) has upgraded its bluegrass trials by garnering more specific test results. "Initially, we grouped the locations by different mowing heights and nitrogen levels to have a balanced level of each," said NTEP National Director Kevin Morris. "We then separated mowing heights and analyzed those together. Then the nitrogen levels were grouped and we ran those. We also attempted to group the locations by geographic region and ran the analysis. This is not perfect, but it's a start," he added. "Hopefully it will help people pick out cultivars that will perform well under different conditions and in different regions." This type of categorization will be done on the new tests with other species as well, he said.

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