

A touch of COLOR

By David McPherson

As overseeding costs continue to rise, greenkeepers are looking at painting greens as an alternative to stretch their budgets.

A little dab of paint here and a little dab there and you can have your greens keeping their color all winter long to wow those tourists from the north and keep your members happy.

As the cost of overseeding continues to rise, greenkeepers are looking for more alternatives to stretch their budgets. Enter the practice of painting. In southern climates, more and more superintendents have implemented painting of greens as part of their standard operating procedures.

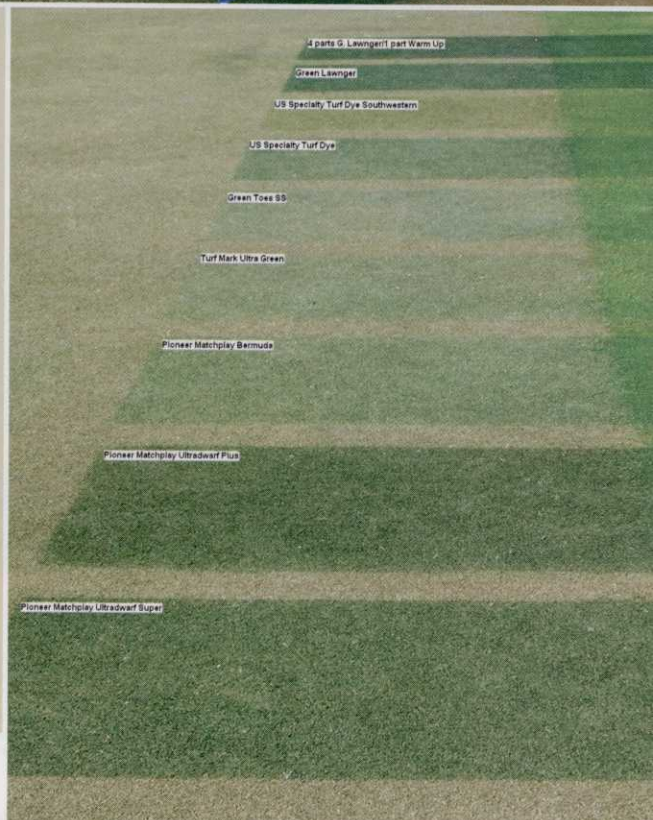
Over the last few years, cost is becoming more and more of a factor when it comes to overseeding. If you treat your whole course, it's not unreasonable to spend more than \$30,000 just on cost of seed and fertilizer; add in labor and you are looking at a big number on one's budget every year. The other major reason more and more superintendents are turning to this practice is due to agronomic transition.

"Overseeding is a big ticket item in budgets," says Joe Lara, product manager, Horticulture & Specialties, Becker Underwood. "It's the primary reason for switching to painting. The secondary reason is for a better agronomic transition. What the USGA people and other researchers have determined is that these fall overseeding programs don't do warm season turf any favors in the spring. They will affect the growth characteristics and recovery of warm season turf in the spring, so now you've set yourself up for competition. A ryegrass, which tends to be more aggressive, will literally fight for their turf. What you have is weakened warm season turf in the spring that just doesn't transition very well. You do that from season to season and it weakens your warm season turf grass."

So, a lot of superintendents today are making changes in their decision on whether to overseed. The cost of painting is slightly less than overseeding, but biggest advantage is a better agronomic transition.

Superintendents can make the argument to not overseed if they can get their maintenance practices down well enough that the end result of painting is acceptable, Lara says. "The turf manager should be making a conscious decision to save labor," he says. "By painting, they don't have to shut the course down for a week or two to grow their cool season grass and their spring transition is far better."

Like the practice of overseeding, it doesn't have to be one or the other when it comes to agronomic practices. Superintendents can now use a combination of turf maintenance practices to achieve the desired result based on their course





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and their budget. Say they have 50 to 60 acres to overseed, could just overseed the fairways and then paint the rough. Or, paint the greens and overseed the fairways. Painting allows them to have more options.

There have been many studies done in respect to types of turf paint available; there is a wide variation of colors among paint options that superintendents will work with to get the look that they want. Becker Underwood offers a product called Green Lawngr, which Lara says is the first and original turf paint in the marketplace having been out there for more than 20 years.

"We have stayed close to our original formulation and it continues to deliver the most natural looking green color in the industry," Lara states. "If you put us side-by-side with a lot of other paint, most will look at Green Lawngr and see that it gives them the most naturally looking green. We have added to that formula in the last two years a process that we call color lock technology. What that does is it ensures that the natural green color that we put on the leaf blade doesn't shift to a bluish color as do a number of other products in the industry."

Lara says that some customers in northern climates are even using Green Lawngr on their bentgrasses to cover up areas that are dam-

Color enhancement study

Kai Umeda from the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension and Brian Whitlark from the USGA Green Section recently completed a color enhancement study at ASU East for Ultradwarf Bermudagrass.

The study is comprised of four different painting products being conducted on a non-overseeded Mini-Verde Ultradwarf bermudagrass green at the ASU East campus practice facility. The four treatments are: Green Lawngr (Becker Underwood), Wintergreen Plus (Precision Labs), and two different products from Pioneer Athletics - Match Play - Ultradwarf Plus and Match Play - Ultradwarf Super. Each of the four treatments was applied between Dec. 2 and 3, 2009. The treated area was 195 square feet for each treated area, where each treatment was replicated three times, for a total treated area of 585 square feet.

Whitlark explains that a white towel was used to determine the amount of 'rub off' from each paint product at one hour after application, two hours after application and at daybreak the following morning. Here is what they observed:

All paint products 'rubbed off' to some extent one hour after application. The Wintergreen Plus product rubbed off more than the other products.

Two hours after application (on a sunny, dry day), nearly no paint rubbed off with any product.

The following morning, the surface was only slightly moist from either dew, guttation water or residual water from the irrigation cycle. All paints rubbed off, but only very slightly with the Match Play and Green Lawngr products. The Wintergreen Plus product rubbed off substantially more than the others.

A ball rolled across the painted surfaces did not show any signs of 'rub off' at any point after spray application.

The estimated retail cost of paint products was: Green Lawngr (\$48/gallon), Wintergreen (\$48/gallon), Ultradwarf Plus (\$28-35/gallon), Ultradwarf Super (\$28-35/gallon).

A few things learned from this study that should be taken into consideration when painting greens:

- The timing of applications;
- Turf condition and vigor;
- The percentage of the green that goes dormant;
- Fertility and pre-conditioning;
- The amount of moisture, irrigation and rainfall;
- The longevity of the paints and dyes;
- The wearability;
- Staining; and
- Cost benefits or disadvantages.

"In consideration for golfers, it is recommended to delay play a minimum of one to two hours after application or maybe more on a very moist and overcast day," Whitlark says. "It is not recommended to irrigate the evening following application. It is possible golfers kneeling down on the painted surface may see some paint on clothing in the early morning hours the day after application. However, this unfortunate circumstance may be avoided simply by rolling or mowing the greens prior to play."

aged. Green Lawngr also lasts longer under prolonged UV exposure.

Rob Collins, superintendent at Paradise Valley Country Club in Arizona, trialed non-overseeded greens on their two chipping greens and one of their practice greens last season. He says, this was done for a couple of

reasons: to gain first-hand experience and to introduce the concept to our members.

This was Collins first experience with not overseeding greens.

"We conducted our evaluation of agronomic inputs during this time as well," he says. "We've been measuring clipping yield in both

volume and weight of our overseeded and non-overseeded greens. We had been warned to be careful of letting the speed get too fast upon frost and slow growth, so in preparation we began raising mowing height during mid-December to anticipate this condition.

"However, we experienced the opposite as indicated by the green speed in the spreadsheet below," he adds. "We continued to water, fertilize and mow the non-overseeded greens very similarly to the overseeded green during this experience."

By January, Collins and his crew felt they could control the speed by managing height-of-cut, using brushes while continuing to water and apply foliar fertilizers.

"As you would imagine, this doesn't support the lower cost argument because many of our inputs were similar to the overseeded greens," he explains. "However, we avoided the labor, fertilizer and water costs associated with overseeding, which is significant. An additional input was painting, which was done the first week of December. We liked the Turf Dye Southwestern as it matches our overseeding color very closely."

Members at Collins' club then participated in an evaluation of the overseeded versus non-overseeded greens during the season. Collins says reviews were very good for the non-overseeded greens upon opening from their overseeding closure.

This continued into December because the non-overseeded greens were smoother and faster, Collins says.

"Both were rated about the same into January," he says. "By February, the non-overseeded greens began growing much more as days lengthened. The members concluded that the trial was a good experience and we will not oversee greens this fall. There is a period in late winter when we may hear some complaints about the visibility of old plugs and we're working on cup changing training to minimize this."

Overall, Collins describes the trial as a success because he got real experience and member feedback. The members, too, got to "kick the tires." But, most importantly, he achieved member buy-in before trying this practice on all of their greens.

"I think not overseeding this season will be a continuation of this learning process for all of us," he says. "We'll continue to make adjustments." **GCI**

David McPherson is a freelance writer based in Toronto.

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