

# Grau Answers Turfgrass Questions

From many courses Dr. Fred V. Grau gets and answers the problems handled in this monthly department of GOLFDOM. Superintendents and club officials can avail themselves of this service without charge or obligation. Address your question to Grau Queries, GOLFDOM, 407 S. Dearborn, Chicago 5, Ill.

ONE of the most important decisions the golf course supt. has to make is the selection of the right grass for the right place, particularly on the putting green. In the "good old days" of greens seeded to fescue and Colonial bent the choice was small and failures were merely reseeded. Today, with several improved creeping bentgrasses to choose from, all of them vegetative and all of them better than Seaside (seeded) under most conditions, the choice becomes a problem requiring the greatest consideration because mistakes are far more costly. The right choice can mean great economy in the long run.

Today we have a great deal of scientific and performance evidence on what these various grasses will do. This department of GOLFDOM is receiving an increasing number of queries: "What grass should I plant on our new greens?"

There are several important considerations in choosing the right grass. Resistance to diseases ranks at the top in Musser's scale of values — and rightly so. From this standpoint Congressional bent would be the right choice in areas where snowmold is serious. Old Orchard also ranks high in this respect. Brownpatch is serious in areas where excessive moisture and high summer temperatures occur. It was in these areas that nature developed Washington, Arlington, Cohansey, and Pennlu bentgrasses, which are resistant to brownpatch. Dollar-spot is a minor disease, easily controlled with nitrogen fertilizer and selected chemicals. It is rarely considered in evaluating a grass. So far as we know there is no grass that can withstand pythium.

As demand for bent greens increases, we

find the bents moving deeper and deeper into the regions of extremely high summer temperatures. This puts a premium on heat resistance. In this class Cohansey, Seaside and Penncross are battling it out. Seaside is easiest to use because seed is available. There is no Penncross now, and only limited supplies are in sight for this fall. Cohansey stolons are not easily available. Many clubs in the desert areas do not care to go to the extra trouble of handling the vegetative material.

## Toronto Requires Knowhow

Toronto bent has its champions in Chicago and in Canada where it is doing a remarkably good job. Those who have been most successful with it say that it takes more knowhow than some of the other strains. There are other grasses of local distinction that someday may outshine some of the present leaders. When this does happen, the course supt. should get credit for spotting and caring for these superior strains. Test plots, nurseries and the small trials that are being established on courses across the country are the proving grounds. No matter how accurate the data from research stations, a new grass can not be said to be wholly acceptable until it has undergone the acid test on the golf courses under many different types of conditions and management.

Regardless of who has responsibility for choosing grasses for a new course, it is wise to consult with the local supt. before making a final decision. Local experience may dictate a choice that won't appear in the text books until the next edition. The supt. is blamed for failure of inferior grasses which he never would have chosen in the first place. He can do only the best he can with what he is handed.

This department welcomes supts' com-

ments on their successes and failures with various grasses as well as questions on choosing the right grass.

**Q**—Our bent greens have a poor winter color. What can we do to improve the color? (Va.)

**A**—Some bents naturally lose their good green color with freezing weather. Washington bent is one of the best examples but even strains with best late fall color become dull in weather that alternately freezes and thaws. About the only thing you can do is spray some green grass dye for quick relief. Grass that is fertilized adequately with nitrogen, balanced with P and K, will hold green color longer than hungry grass.

**Q**—Last summer we were forced to water our greens frequently to prevent wilting and loss of grass. The turf got quite thin and algae appeared, especially in low spots and where there was heavy traffic. Is the same thing likely to happen again? (Pa.)

**A**—Yes, particularly if you do not do something to improve drainage and aeration. The soil probably is compact and crusted. This excludes air (oxygen) from the roots. Water lies on the surface to cause "scald"

which further complicates the problem. Aeration, or cultivation, is of first importance. Deep placement of fertilizer will encourage heavier rooting. By improving the infiltration of water it will be possible to keep the surface drier. Algae can not grow when the grass is dry.

**Q**—We have heard that hydrated lime lightly dusted on greens will check algae. What can you tell us about this? (W.Va.)

**A**—Many authorities recommend, and supts. use, hydrated lime at 2 to 5-lbs. to 1,000 sq. ft. when algae appears. The lime tends to dry the surface quickly. The rapid change in pH also is believed to check the growth of algae. To apply the material in water as a spray does not seem to do the same amount of good. Mixing the hydrated lime with screened topdressing helps get it distributed uniformly. It is not necessary to water it in. Footprints may tend to cause slight burning. Late afternoon applications will help to minimize this.

**Q**—In applying green dye to warm-season grasses, is it best to wait until the grass is dormant and brown? We have heard that it sticks better if it is done while bermuda or zoysia still retains some of its natural

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green color. What is your opinion? (NJ)

A—Steiniger at Pine Valley, Farnham at Philadelphia, and others have shown me they get improved results by spraying green dye while the grass still retains a large part of its natural summer-green color. Recently we learned this principle holds in other parts of the country.

Q—We have had our soils tested for years and are pleased with what we have accomplished with the help of recommendations which have accompanied the returns. Tissue testing has been mentioned as another way of helping keep track of what we are doing. How valuable do you think this is? (Ill.)

A—Experiment stations have been making intensive studies on the value of tissue tests and some simple effective methods have been devised. If the test is carefully conducted on a sample properly taken and handled, and if chemicals (reagents) are fresh and viable, the tissue test will yield valuable information. Do not take too seriously the results of the first few or the first dozen tests. Each succeeding test will become more informative because you will begin to correlate results with performance of the grass. We like to think of tissue tests as supporting evidence for soil tests. Consult your experiment station for its version of tissue testing. There are good kits on the market.

Q—Our bermudagrass nursery grew quite tall last fall and now it is a tangled mass of grass. It looks hopeless to try to mow. Someone suggested burning it off but we are afraid that this might ruin it. What would you do? (Md.)

A—We would burn it off. In fact, we have been doing this for years. We checked with Dr. Burton of Tifton and he approves the practice. Be sure you can control the fire. Check with the fire company if you are residential. Be sure there is an ample supply of moisture in the soil to prevent damage to roots and rhizomes. Try to burn into the wind to get more complete burn. Try to get it done before there is much green growth.

Q—We have very heavy play on our course and we do a lot of irrigating. The result is that we get extreme compaction. We all know what this does to the grass and what we ought to do about it. Every time we get the equipment out and start to work the howls of complaints are not pleasant to hear. We are discouraged because we're having increasing difficulty in holding turf under these conditions. Other

courses can get the work done. Why can't we? (Calif.)

A—Psychological effect on the golfer when he sees an apparently perfect putting surface interfered with in any way is a dilemma. Where necessary work has been accomplished most successfully and with the least complaints, golfers have been "conditioned" or informed. Major operations must be scheduled at a time when there are no major golfing events. It is most important that the green chmn. and pro be fully advised so they can take the pressure off you. A note in the club publication or a notice on the bulletin board will go a long way in keeping the golfers informed. After all, you are only trying to improve conditions for them and give them the best possible playing conditions. Why not tell them just that?

Q—Last year we got rid of our sand greens and planted U-3 bermudagrass. We had a hot, dry season but watered well. The grass grew better than we expected. As a result we did not keep up with it; in fact we didn't know much about managing a grass green and now we have a lot of tall growth. If we mow it close we'll have a lot of rough stubble. Should we topdress heavily? How much water will it need? (Neb.)

A—We suggest burning off a heavy growth of bermuda. We recommend this in your case. Then, as soon as growth gets under way, fertilize generously — 1-lb. of nitrogen to 1,000 sq. ft. every two weeks. Topdress, yes, but not heavily. Just enough to smooth the surface for good putting and smooth mowing. Start mowing at  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch as soon as there is anything to mow. Mow daily. Use a brush or comb on the mower. Water well (deep soaking) not more than once a week. You might stretch this some. You probably will have to turn to vertical mowing as the turf gets thicker and when a mat begins to develop. This is a natural occurrence with vigorous spreading grasses. U-3 is not one of the best bermudas for putting greens but it is well adapted for you and will be a vast improvement over sand greens.

### Trans-Mississippi Tourneys

Trans-Mississippi Seniors Golf Assn. will hold its third annual tournament at the Thunderbird GC, Palm Springs, Calif., Apr. 2-7. Trans-Mississippi Golf Assn's annual championship will be played at Oklahoma City G & CC, June 18-24.