
Grau's Answers to Turf Questions

If you've got a question you want Dr. Fred V. Grau to answer, please address it to Grau Q&A, Golfdom, 407 S. Dearborn, Chicago 5, Ill.

Take Another Look at Zoysia for Tees and Fairways

Most of the questions that come into GOLFDOM's Q&A dept. imply that greens present more of a problem than any other turf on the course. It is undoubtedly true that problems with greens are more critical and more in need of immediate specialized attention than anything else. "If you don't have greens, you don't have a golf course," is the way it should be expressed.

We have no quarrel with the importance of greens. And please, Mr. Architect, when new courses are planned and built, won't you insist on perfect drainage and a porous sandy soil to permit easier maintenance and better playing conditions? It isn't any fun to live with a sick green and to listen to the gripes about bum turf — and then be obliged to rebuild and install drainage that should have been there in the first place. Why is it that there isn't enough money to install tile drains during construction, but there always seems to be enough to rebuild later on?

How About Tees, Fairways?

Now for tees and fairways which seem to be generally bypassed, but which deserve their share of the attention. Committees begin to sit up and take notice when goosegrass, knotweed, clover and crabgrass take over. We shall not solve all tee and fairway problems in this short editorial but a few basic principles are outlined for guidance.

1. Water and Choice of Grass: The total

water situation has become so critical that, in planting new courses or in planning conversion of old ones, serious consideration should be given to those grasses and to practices which provide good turf with little or no artificial irrigation. This would place Berumdas and zoysias in top position among the warm-season grasses. They deserve attention as far north as they can be grown. Bluegrass and fescues top the list beyond the zoysia line. Bentgrass seems to be waning in popularity because of its high maintenance requirements — especially where water is concerned — and its summer weaknesses.

2. Fertilizer: Science has shown that well-fed plants can use water far more efficiently than hungry ones. In turf, nitrogen is the key element, balanced with P and K, and other nutrients as needed. Everyone knows that well-fed turf is its own best weed control. Wise choice of the grass is basic to effective utilization of fertilizer. Weak, poorly-adapted grasses can't make best use of plant food. Weeds usually take over.

Plant Food Essential

A club that has limited funds should spend no time arguing about whether to fertilize or to install a water system. First, supply plant food in adequate quantities. In many cases, supplemental irrigation will not be needed. Convert to the most drought tolerant grass if this has not been done. Then, if water runs short, or if there is a drought, there still will be turf to play on. Color does not necessarily affect a golf shot but quality of turf is a big factor. Many clubs have converted tees and fairways to Bermuda when bluegrass and bent have failed. Recently there has been a new interest in zoysia on both tees and fairways. There have been some disappointments with both Bermuda and zoysia, mostly because of faulty maintenance. Too much water has hurt both grasses; failure to mow closely enough has developed unplayable thatch and mat; too little nitrogen has caused Bermuda to go backwards.

Zoysia pushes forward even under low levels of nitrogen feeding. Zoysia has been found doing well much farther north than Bermudas. Apparently we need to take another good long hard look at Zoysia which maintains near-perfection with minimum maintenance. Above all, give attention to it because it can take punishment and recover well, and because it can be mowed closely and frequently without damage.

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