by Fred V. Grau

ANSWERS TO TURF QUESTIONS

Turfgrass: a "must" for a better environment

Living turf is a significant factor in improving the environment. It has roots in the soil, it absorbs rainfall, oxygen is released, carbon dioxide is absorbed, respiration cools the atmosphere, players feel the resilience underfoot and the natural green color is a delight to the eye.

Plastic or artificial turf is something different. It adds nothing to the environment, it has no roots, it absorbs no rainfall, releases no oxygen, has nothing to do with carbon dioxide.

Absorption of air-borne toxins by living turf has to be a real plus. This feature is being played up by horticulturists and arborists as a reason for planting trees. A few have even plugged turfgrass for the same reason.

Living, breathing turf has been, in some instances, replaced by synthetic turf for two very good reasons: 1) The owners were unwilling to spend the few extra dollars to prepare the base, the drainage, and to supply the right grass and to fertilize and manage it properly; 2) The turfgrass manager assigned to take care of the turf didn't know his job and couldn't meet the job requirements.

True, there are some situations where living turf can't take it. One example is the Astrodome where there is not enough light to grow grass and the intensity of usage is beyond the capacity of living grass to survive.

In golf the only place where an artificial mat seems to be justified is on a tee which is too small and where the play is so heavy that living turf just can't make the grade. Golf superintendents have a glorious chance to keep living turf in the "ball park" by calling on all resources (their own and those of university scientists) to maintain beautiful playing turf under seemingly impossible odds.

Q—*Our club is considering sprigging P-16 bermudagrass into new fairways in 1971 after some kind of temporary seeding. In your opinion is this the way to go?*
(Maryland)

A—My personal experience does not include P-16, although its origin and background are well known to me. In consultation with Dr. Juska at Beltsville and with A.J. Powell at University of Maryland I conclude: 1) P-16 has not been released or approved for use on fairways in Maryland; 2) performance in test plots has been mediocre and disappointing. With several excellent cool-season grasses of known performance available, which provide green turf nearly year-round, may I suggest a reassessment of your goals. Annual reseeding to thicken turf in certain areas seems to be excellent planning especially with improved reseeding equipment that does not require "scorched earth" or taking the course out of play.

Q—*Ours is a new seaside course which occasionally is subject to salt spray. Greens will be seeded fall 1970 (we hope). My choice is Putting Green Quality Blue Tag Certified Penncross creeping bent. Are there other putting green bents that I should consider. (Maryland)*

A—Penncross has all the salt-spray tolerance that you will need for your greens. As you know, this polycross bent has had bred into it the ability to compensate for unusual conditions and to adapt itself to the local environment. This advantage simply cannot be ignored. Cost is moderate.

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Q—*In spite of extensive research, many conferences, after-hours discussions and shall we say arguments, we still seem to have wide differences about soil texture, sand sizes, drainage and other features. We can't seem to agree on how best to grow perfect turf. Is there a board of arbitration? Is there a final judgment? How can these differences be resolved? (Oklahoma)*

A—Let me assure you, you have not reached that point of final judgment. To many, unfortunately, "sand" is still "sand," even though one sample contains 10 per cent clay; the other 0.5 per cent clay, even though both screen out the same.

The best solution that I can see for the future is: 1) more research, 2) regional conferences of scientists to iron out the discrepancies and 3) more study and awareness of current data by architects, builders and superintendents. There seems to be a lack of understanding of the data that has been presented by scientific research. In some cases the deficiency has been interpretation of data. Let's face it, we still have a long way to go.

Q—*Bluegrass or bent (one or the other) is fine for fairways when you go far enough north; bermudagrass (or zoysia) is fine if you go far enough south. Have we solved the dilemma of fairways in the "crabgrass belt," where the "dead" bermuda in the spring is abhorred or, in some cases, the rotting* Poa annua *in August causes members to take up tennis? Is there an answer? (Virginia)*

A—There is hope for the "twilight zone." There are new bluegrasses that can move further south if given intelligent management. There is tall fescue that, on some courses, is providing sensational fairway turf. The new turf-type perennial rye-grasses, reseeded annually, are doing a job that many thought impossible. I've mentioned no variety names—they are available from several experiment stations. Skepticism runs rife when tall fescue is mentioned, but you should see it to believe it. Few superintendents have yet given the improved bluegrass and turf-type ryegrasses a chance. The name of the game is, however, "intelligent management."

Q—*We are looking forward to fall overseeding of our bermudagrass greens with mixed emotions. Nothing we have used to date has been entirely satisfactory. We've been encouraged to try some of the fine turf-type ryegrasses alone and in combination with some of the other cool-season grasses we have been using. Would you venture an opinion? (North Carolina)*

A—It may be too long to wait before you get the answers from research quarters so I would encourage you to treat one or two greens with one or two of the leading fine perennial ryegrasses. They cost more per pound, but their performance leads us to believe that you will need less seed to get the same amount of coverage. □