



by Fred V. Grau

ANSWERS TO TURF QUESTIONS

What to use?

With the coming of spring and another season of planting, questions are being asked which indicate confusion and indecision concerning what to plant. This is especially true of the bluegrasses. Pennstar, an improved Kentucky bluegrass developed by Joseph Duich at Penn State, has joined Merion, Prato, Fylking, Newport, Windsor, Park, Cougar, Sodco and all the rest of the named varieties available. In addition, there are the common types, including South Dakota Certified Common. Where does each one fit? What are its limitations regarding climate, use, fertilizer requirements, tolerance to close mowing, susceptibility to pests and diseases and other factors? Hopefully each new variety will be superior in every respect, but can we safely assume this?

The trend is toward blends. The idea is that the strong features of certain components will mask the weak points of another. For example, Merion's superior leafspot resistance covers for varieties that are weak in this regard; Fylking with its resistance to stripe smut covers for Merion which is susceptible. Common bluegrass is notoriously susceptible to leafspot. To plant it alone for lawns or fairways without a strong leafspot resistant companion would be inviting disaster. But what should the blend contain in

Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, Ohio and all the way to Nebraska and Colorado?

It is of interest that when turf research begins to flower at the University of Nebraska, the number one goal apparently will be to solve the blend problem. In the meantime we shall hope to gather data from every bluegrass consuming state and experiment station to find more answers to the dilemma. Let us not forget that there are those bluegrasses reproduced by vegetative means only. Among them are Warren's A-10, A-20 and A-34. While this is neither the time nor the place to elaborate on their merits, they are in use and they do have a place. It will take more time to sort them out into their special categories but, so far, they stand alone and do not seem to lend themselves to blends with seeded bluegrasses.

Another big question is, "Should I include red fescue or ryegrass?" It would seem that red fescue has no place in a blend of elite bluegrasses that are maintained at a fertility level suitable for bluegrass. The fact remains that many bluegrass mixtures contain red fescue and ryegrass.

The new elite fine-leaf perennial ryegrasses (Pelo, NK-100, Manhattan and Pennfine) have a place in bluegrass blends especially in spring seedings where summer protection is needed. We've had excellent results from a simple Pelo-Merion-Fylking mixture for fairways. In some cases we will work Pennstar into the blend. If seed supplies are short, Prato can be added as an "extender."

The better turf varieties of bluegrasses tend to be poor seed producers which raises production costs and retail prices. Research has shown that with adequate nutrients in the seedbed, light rates of seeding can produce the desired turf density. So, when supplies of elite varieties are short, plant less seed and "beef up" the seedbed nutrients.

No replacement foreseen

Q—Do you feel that, because of its tolerance to close, frequent mowing, Fylking bluegrass will replace Merion for fairways? (Minnesota)

A—We do not anticipate any "replacement" of Merion by Fylking, because both grasses are quite tolerant of close mowing and are compatible. In practice we find Merion and Fylking being used in about equal parts in blends with other varieties.

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Q—We pump our irrigation water out of a creek that is very high in sodium. How will this affect our turf?
(Michigan)

A—Depending on the concentration of sodium in the creek water and the rate at which water is used you might anticipate a gradual reduction in turf quality. If your soils are very well drained there is the very good possibility that the sodium will be flushed away with the drainage waters. One good way to keep sodium moving is to provide calcium ions through the application of limestone.

Reduce, do not remove

Q—What is the best way to remove thatch from putting greens with one-half inch accumulation? Also, on fairways with about 1½ inches accumulation?
(Indiana)

A—One-half-inch accumulation on greens I would call "cushion" which improves the playing quality. Don't try to remove it. Just punch it full of holes to let water, air and nutrients into the rootzone. On fairways you must aerate to get water through the thatch. Since you did not specify the

kind of grass you have or anything about your management practices, I am in the dark. We know that applications of limestone help to reduce thatch. Vigorous aeration also will help. Avoid excessive irrigation and nitrogen feeding, both of which contribute to thatch. Biological decomposition should be your goal. Mechanical removal is risky.

Q—In the past you have written about using potassium sulfate (K_2SO_4) on turf whenever potash is needed. Can you bring us up to date on potassium sulfate and give us reasons for using it?
(Virginia)

A—There is no need here to elaborate on the advantage of keeping potassium levels adequate in turf—we are all too aware of the troubles we have when potash is inadequate. The principal advantage of specifying potassium sulfate for turf is that each 100 pounds of this product yields 17.6 pounds of sulfur, a macro-nutrient which is deficient in many areas especially where nitrogen and phosphorous are used in quantity. Yes, potassium sulfate costs a bit more than muriate of potash, but the value of the sulfur more than compensates for the slightly higher cost. Sulfur is essential

to plant growth. The need for sulfur is closely related to the amounts of nitrogen being applied. It is essential for many biological processes in green plants. Turfgrasses have improved color and density when sulfur is balanced with nitrogen and other nutrients. Sulfur aids in enhancing winter hardiness, drought tolerance, decomposition of thatch and control of insects and diseases.

You may be sure that, when I have a chance to make a recommendation, I specify sulfate of potash to be very sure that my client's turf will not suffer from hidden sulfur hunger.

Q—We have been advised to plant our sandy loam fairways to a mixture which contains Prato, Delta, Pennlawn fescue and Pelo perennial ryegrass. Forty-five per cent of the mixture is Pennlawn. Doesn't that seem to be excessive?
(Vermont)

A—Forty-five per cent Pennlawn in a bluegrass mixture does seem to be rather high. In the mixture suggested 25 per cent Pennlawn ought to be ample. I question the use of Delta bluegrass when there are better turf bluegrasses on the market. Was the salesman's recommendation based on fact or fancy? □

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