

It's November, and I couldn't be happier with cloudy skies, cool rain and daytime highs in the low 40s. No, my last name isn't Munster. I just still need to cool off from the sweltering weather that accompanied the Rutgers Turfgrass Research Field Days held at turf farms in central New Jersey late last summer. The sun beat down on those days, with temperatures around 100 degrees. I was feeling the heat, all right. I felt like a wilted strand of *Poa annua*.

But I learned a lot, and I thought I'd share what I heard from the Rutgers' turf experts with you. Here goes:

Vantage velvet

Several Rutgers University/Cook College turf researchers were raving about velvet bentgrass during the golf and fine turf segment of the program. How do Rutgers' researchers love velvet bentgrass in the Northeast? Let them count the ways.

They say that velvet bentgrass:

- has more of a vibrant green color than other bentgrass varieties;
- is more competitive against weeds;
- is more dollar-spot resistant than creeping bentgrass and more brown-patch resistant than colonial bentgrass;
- performs well during drought;
- holds up well under heavy traffic; and
- has dense growth and fine leaf texture.

Karen Plumley, who helps operate the school's two-year turfgrass management program, said several velvet varieties performed well in the 1998 National Turfgrass Evaluation Program bentgrass study. She cited SR 7200, which has been commercially available for several years, and Vesper 2001, an experimental variety that recently became available. "We've been working with velvets for about eight years, and we believe they have many advantages over creeping bentgrass," she says.

Plumley scanned the many varieties of turf comprising the bentgrass test plot on the farm. She said the velvet varieties are the perennial favorites of visitors throughout the year.

"If I told you to stand on your favorite plot, you would without a doubt be standing on one of the velvet bentgrass plots," she says.

Velvet Is Smooth, Researchers Say

BY LARRY AYLWARD



"I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY [VELVET BENTGRASS] HAS NEVER BEEN POPULAR HERE," SAYS RUTGERS' TURF EXPERT

OK, velvet bentgrasses aren't perfect. "They do get a disease called copper spot, which looks like dollar spot, but it's not," Plumley said.

They also can get root pythium in the fall if they're not treated with a fungicide.

Velvets haven't performed well in Southern and Midwestern states, which could be attributed to a high soil pH.

"Velvets don't like high pH," said William Meyer, a Rutgers/Cook College pathology professor. "That may be the reason they're not performing as well across the country as they are here."

Minor problems aside, Rutgers researchers are intrigued by velvet bentgrass.

"It's amazing how bright the velvets look," said Steve Hart, an extension specialist at Rutgers/Cook College. "I don't understand why they've never been popular grasses here. I think it's a matter of not having the information on how to manage them properly."

About those well-kept greens . . .

Bruce Clarke, director of the school's Center for Turf Science, warned superintendents who are core aerifying, topdressing, verticutting and double-cutting their greens that they're risking an outbreak of anthracnose basal stem rot and — yikes — he says "you're really going to have a hard time getting it under control."

"The key is — and this is sacrilegious but I'll say it anyway — you need to raise the height of cut slightly," Clarke says. "You also need to pump up your nitrogen levels."

You've come a long way, baby

The first turf-type ryegrasses were produced and released in the 1960s. One of the earliest landmark varieties developed by Rutgers

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researchers was Manhattan. "Since then, there has been a Manhattan 2, a Manhattan 3, and they're probably working on a Manhattan 4 as we speak," said Jim Murphy, an extension specialist at Rutgers.

Since the '60s, there's been a boom in ryegrass varieties, and recent breeding programs have developed better turf-type varieties, Murphy adds, noting that early varieties were hindered by poor mowing quality and greater sensitivity to pest problems. "The older varieties are nowhere near the quality we have today," he says.

Bios for dollar

Dollar spot has been around for more than 100 years, but it's been a real pain in the golf course industry's backside in only the past five years, especially on fairways.

Clarke was asked if any biological fungicides could help control dollar spot. "We're always looking for biologicals that give good disease control," he answered.

"The key is – and this is sacrilegious but I'll say it anyway – you need to raise the height of cut slightly."

BRUCE CLARKE, RUTGERS

But Clarke wouldn't say if a biological product would perform as well as a synthetic fungicide. "Our recommendation is: When you find a biological that works, weave it into your program—either in a tankmix combination with reduced rates of synthetic fungicides or alternating with synthetic products," he said.



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Syngenta's tandem

Clarke said colonial bentgrass is more susceptible to brown patch than creeping bentgrass. But he says Rutgers researchers have discovered that tankmixing two fungicides — Syngenta's Heritage and Banner — may extend the interval of an application from 14 days to 21 days. Heritage is a strobilurin, and Banner is a demethylase inhibitor.

Stacy Bonos, an assistant professor, said the school is trying to breed a colonial bentgrass that's more brown-patch resistant.

Unbreakable?

Of all cool-season grasses, tall fescue is the most tolerant of insects. It's not that insects don't feed on tall fescue, but the grass can outgrow the damage before it becomes severe. Tall fescue also has deeper roots to combat hungry grubs. And because of the deeper roots, hungry crows have a difficult time peeling back tall fescue to get to the grubs.

Burn, baby, burn

If you're looking to do away with the weeds — as fast as you can say "dandelion, dandelion, dandelion" — you

Rutgers/Cook College turf experts say velvet bentgrass has more of a vibrant green color than other bentgrass varieties, among other positive attributes.

might want to try a herbicide with carfentrazone, which provides rapid desiccation of broadleaf weeds at low use rates. "It won't give you better weed control, but it will give you more rapid burn of weeds," Hart said.

But Hart warns superintendents to use herbicides with carfentrazone on roughs and collars only. Keep it away from fairways and greens, especially bentgrass. "I'm a little leery of using it on them," he adds.

Out with the old?

It's probably no surprise that the newer bentgrass varieties are more apt to keep *Poa annua* from launching a full-scale invasion. In a recent trial, researchers overseeded several bentgrass varieties with *Poa* to see which bentgrasses could keep the *Poa* in check. The older varieties, which don't have the density of the newer bents, allowed more *Poa* invasion.

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