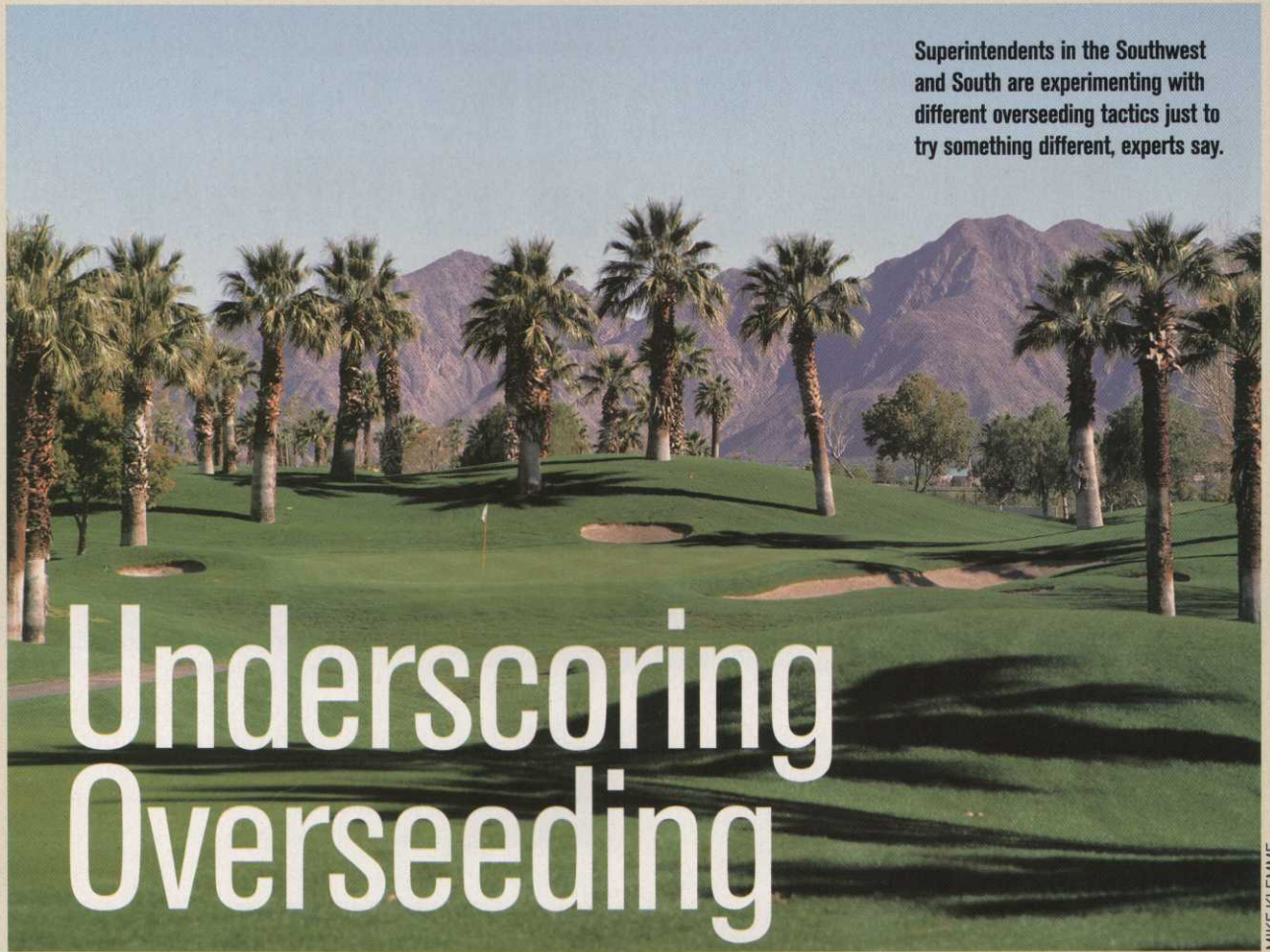


# Real-Life Solutions

OVERSEEDING OPTIONS

Superintendents in the Southwest and South are experimenting with different overseeding tactics just to try something different, experts say.



MIKE KLEMM

## Underscoring Overseeding

Experts shed light on various options, strategies for turf throughout the golf course

BY LARRY AYLWARD, EDITOR

### Challenge

The overseeding arena has its tried-and-true methods. But superintendents and other overseeding experts are on the watch for new methods.

### Solutions

Some superintendents are experimenting with velvet and colonial bentgrasses on greens because they're less heat-tolerant. Others are turning to fine fescue for use on greens and fairways.

**F**runk "Butch" Gill, sales manager for Turf Merchants and a seasoned pro of the seed business, compares overseeding golf courses to a paper plate at a picnic. "Hmmm," you say to yourself, wondering what the connection might be. Let Gill explain.

"You want the plate to hold all the fried chicken and potato salad that you can eat," Gill says. "But you want to be able to throw the plate away as soon as you're done with the meal.

"That's the way overseeding is," Gill concludes. "You want to use it, get [the turf] up and be able to dispose of [the grass] as easily as possible."

Gill's offbeat metaphor makes great sense. In his 30-year career, Gill has seen all sorts of overseeding strategies — and he's still watch-

ing them evolve. In recent conversations with Gill and other overseeding experts, including superintendents, *Golfdom* asked them to talk about current overseeding options.

### 'It really stands out'

It was as dreary a winter as Jason Kubel has seen in northern Florida in some time. "It was horrible," says Kubel, superintendent of the TPC at Tampa Bay.

The winter was wet, dark and unseasonably cool. "We had more than 20 frost days, and we usually have about seven," Kubel says. "We had 18 inches of rain in December."

Thanks to the lousy weather, it was a crummy winter for overseeding golf courses. But one bermudagrass green at the TPC at Tampa Bay was in good shape — the TifEagle practice green, which Kubel overseeded with a blend of *Poa trivialis* and velvet bentgrass.

"We put down about 3 pounds of velvet and 12 pounds of *Poa triv* per 1,000 square feet," Kubel says. "The velvet looks nice. It stands out in the morning when there's dew on it."

Mike Hills, regional sales manager and assistant plant breeder/research agronomist at Seed Research of Oregon, and Jerry Pepin, vice president and general manager of Pickseed West, say a few Southern superintendents are experimenting with velvet for overseeding.

"It's pretty rare, but a few of them are trying it just to try something different," says Pepin, whose company markets Vesper velvet.

Hills, whose company markets SR7200 velvet, says the bentgrass is good for winter overseeding in low light. That's a big factor when cloudy days and low light — like the weather in Tampa and other parts of the Southeast this winter — cause turf thinning and poor turf color, Hills notes.

Velvet also sports a dark green color favored by many superintendents, Hills says. And Pepin notes that velvet also tolerates heat less than creeping bentgrass, so it will die off quicker during transition in the late spring and summer.

Pepin says velvet is best when mixed with fine fescue and *Poa triv*. He says the mixture provides the "ultimate spring turf quality" for greens, with velvet peaking in the late spring. "If you had a big spring event where you wanted the ultimate greens, you could get a month or two where they would really look terrific and then it would start dying out in the summer," Pepin adds.

Hills and Pepin point out that velvet's small seed (there are 7 to 8 million seeds per pound) can get under the dense canopy of the newer bermudas more easily.

"It gets in every nook and cranny," Pepin says. "With enough seed, there will be some take."

Greg Freyermuth, technical agronomist and overseeding salesman for Turf-Seed, says a few superintendents are also experimenting with colonial bentgrass in overseeding. Colonial establishes quickly and, like velvet, doesn't have the heat tolerance of creeping bentgrass. Turf-Seed introduced two new colonial varieties last year, Alister and Glory.

It also offers the velvet bentgrass Greenwich.

"I'm not going out and actively pushing colonial bent for overseeding unless a superintendent wants to use it with *Poa triv* instead of creeping bentgrass," Freyermuth says. "But the interest is there, and some superintendents are checking it out as an alternative."

### 'Fine' idea

Hills says more superintendents are also showing interest in fine fescues for overseeding from fairways to greens. Fine fescues are salt tolerant and are a perfect match for overseeding turf that's been damaged by too much salt.

For instance, last year some Southeastern and Southwestern courses that irrigate with effluent water experienced salt problems that caused a fungal disease called rapid blight or chytrid. This happened when the courses didn't receive enough rain to flush the salt from the effluent through the turf. "That's where the fine fescues come into play," Hills says.

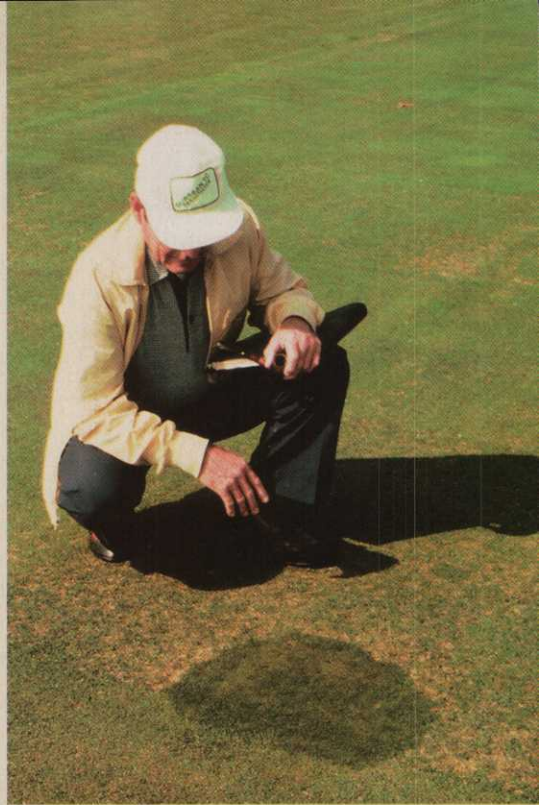
Steve Tubbs, owner and president of Turf Merchants, also expects fine fescue to become popular again in fairway overseeding mixes.

"Several years ago, we had an 85 percent perennial ryegrass and 15 percent fine-fescue blend for fairways," Tubbs says. "It really helped the transitional qualities, and the fine fescue provides a base. But superintendents got away from it because the cost of fine fescue climbed so high. But now it's back to the same price as perennial ryegrass."

### Help is here

Gill says two new herbicides have helped superintendents with their overseeding strategies — Griffin LLC's TranXit GTA and Bayer Environmental Science's Revolver. TranXit GTA is a good transition tool for the removal of perennial ryegrass and *Poa annua* in overseeded bermudagrass and other warm-season turf. Revolver is a post-emergent herbicide that removes unwanted cool-season grasses from warm-season

*Continued on page 86*



SEED RESEARCH OF OREGON

The late C. Richard Skogley, a turfgrass breeder and professor at the University of Rhode Island, studies a patch of velvet bentgrass in a creeping bentgrass plot.

Read another  
**Real-Life Solutions**  
on page 98

**“When you overseed year after year, the *Poa annua* builds up no matter how clean the seed is.”**

BUTCH GILL,  
SALES MANAGER  
TURF MERCHANTS

*Continued from page 85*

grasses and can be applied up to four weeks prior to overseeding on warm-season grasses.

“When you overseed year after year, the *Poa annua* builds up no matter how clean the seed is,” Gill says, noting that eventually the *Poa* and other unwanted cool-season grass has to be removed.

### What else is new?

Gill and Freyeremuth say some Southern superintendents, who converted their courses' greens from old bermuda 328 to the new ultradwarfs, aren't overseeding anymore.

That's because many of the ultradwarfs, including Champion and TifEagle, are more cold-tolerant.

Gill also says few courses still use ryegrass on greens. “Most are using *Poa triv* or *Poa triv* with creeping bent or redtop bent,” he says.

But Kubel notes that a few of his peers have gone back to using ryegrass and *Poa triv* blends on greens.

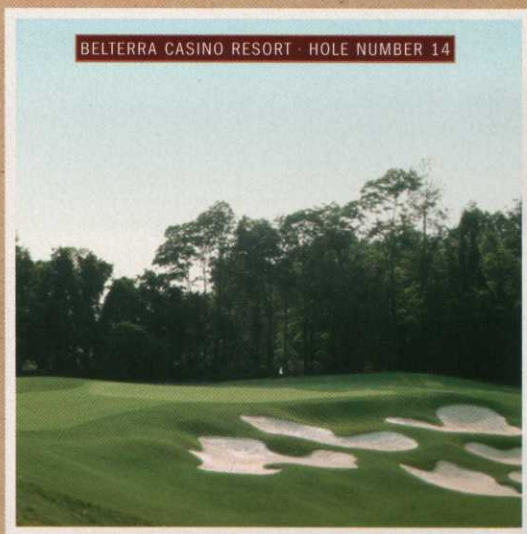
“They're mowing at a little over one-eighth inch and maintaining speeds at 9 feet on public courses where extremely low heights aren't mandatory,” he says. “The daily players are happy with that.”

Speaking of ryegrass, Tubbs says superintendents are overseeding fairways with less pounds of perennial ryegrass because its price has skyrocketed in recent months.

Before the increase, which was brought on by smaller crops and reduced yield, superintendents were overseeding fairways at about 800 pounds an acre, Tubbs notes. But they've reduced their seeding rates to 400 pounds to 600 pounds an acre because of the higher prices.

Gill offers some parting words of wisdom. He reminds superintendents that overseeding is not just about seed.

“It's also about the maintenance practice, it's about the nutrients package, it's about the weed-control package and it's about the mechanical practices you use,” he says. ■



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# Real-Life Solutions

■ BUNKER RECONSTRUCTION

## A Big Drain

Southern superintendents  
sold on Billy Bunkers

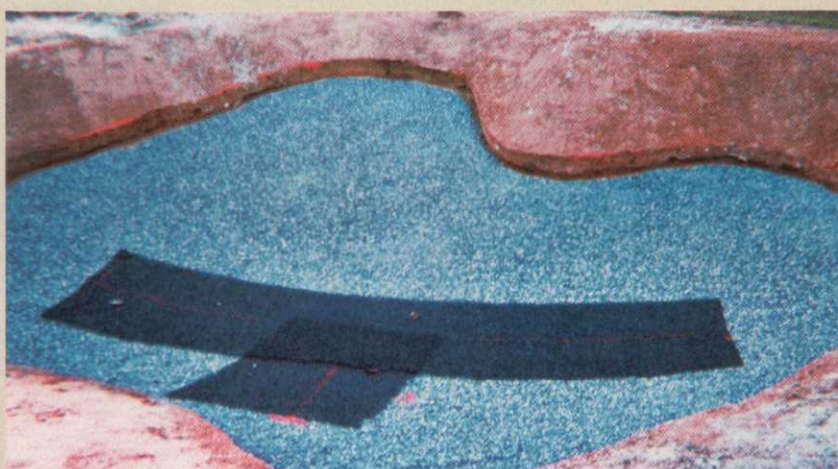
BY HAL PHILLIPS

**A**t bottom, rainfall is a superintendent's ally. But there are subclimates where too much of a good thing can wreak havoc on bunker-maintenance budgets and crew scheduling.

"I've witnessed as much as 130 inches in a single year and as 'little' as 56 inches, which we consider a drought around here," says Bo Alexander, superintendent at Wade Hampton GC in Cashiers, a North Carolina community nestled high in the verdant Blue Ridge Mountains.

They're verdant for a reason. As Alexander notes, this is one of the wettest corners of the country and even well-built bunkers can't reasonably drain away that sort of inundation. Instead, they wash out — over and over again — at a great cost and inconvenience to clubs.

After spending a fortune and untold manhours rebuilding his bunkers year



**(Top)** The Billy Bunker's white Trevira liner prevents the bunker sand from migrating into the native soil, and vice versa. **(Below)** Note how the liners are specially cut out to reveal (and promote water passage to) the bunker's drainage pattern.

after year, Alexander embarked on a "radical" renovation of Wade Hampton's 38 greenside bunkers. During the winter of 2001-02, he watched closely as the course contractor employed a hot technique in renovation today: the Billy Bunker method.

Eighteen months later, Alexander can't say enough about his Billy Bunkers or the construction firm, Gainesville, Ga.-based Course Crafters, which has worked at Wade Hampton, tackling an assortment of projects alongside Alexander since 1993.

"These bunkers get the water into the tile so fast, the sand doesn't have time to wash," Alexander says. "Course Crafters did all 38 [greenside] bunkers in one three-month period. It involved a lot of hand-work, which is something you need to understand about the Billy Bunkers. But the folks at Course

Crafters got it done, and they get high marks from me."

Alexander emphasizes that while Wade Hampton is one of the most decorated courses in America — the 1987 Tom Fazio design ranks 37th on *Golf Digest's* Top 100, 52nd on *Golf Magazine's* list — it's also one of the dampest, receiving an average annual rainfall of 85 inches.

"So you can see why we brought in Course Crafters to address the bunker situation," Alexander says. "They shelled them all out and redrained

### Problem

The bunkers at two clubs, both in high rainfall regions, were continually washing out, sapping maintenance funds and manpower, and irking the clubs' members.

### Solution

Rebuild the hazards using the Billy Bunker Method, a drainage-intensive technique that provides cost-effectiveness through long-term durability.

them in the Billy method. They also removed and replaced 400,000 square feet of sod around the greens.”

Course Crafters has plenty of renovation experience when it comes to Billy Bunkers — so named because the method was invented by Billy Fuller, former superintendent of Augusta (Ga.) National GC, where Course Crafters has been handling renovations for the past decade, including the latest round of changes supervised by Fazio. But Course Crafters President Bob Pinson says his crews didn't learn the Billy Bunker Method in Augusta.

“We first executed the Billy Bunkers up at Charlotte (N.C.) CC,” Pinson explains. “I learned the method from Mark Stoddard, who was superintendent in Charlotte at that time. Billy Fuller sent the specs to me, and we did them as part of architect Brian Silva's restoration at Charlotte in 1995. I don't know of anyone who was doing Billy Bunkers, other than Billy himself, as early as 1995. We've done hundreds of them since.”

The Billy Bunker Method allows for excellent drainage because, as Pinson explains, each lateral drainage arm runs straight into an outfall pipe — or into individual “smiley” drains located at the terminus of each lateral. Once all this base drainage capability has been established, a 1.5-inch layer of gravel is laid over the entire bunker floor, capped by a Trevira liner, which is specially cut to reveal the herringbone drainage pattern. Then the entire drain-line scheme is further overlaid with Enkamat, a fiberglass mesh material which keeps the gravel from resurfacing in the sand layer.

“Then you put your 4 inches of sand over it and you're done, with that bunker at least,” Pinson says. “The hand-work required [to lay the gravel and custom-fit the liners] is where this process gets labor-intensive and expensive. But in the long run, with all the repairs you end up doing to a regular bunker and all the wash-out repair, a

new Billy Bunker ends up costing less. In my view, the Billy Bunkers ultimately reduce maintenance costs. The upfront cost is considerable, but you'll pay for your bunker renovation within five years.”

It's a trade-off, but one that many superintendents in the soggy Southeast are increasingly willing to make. Superintendent Tim Kennelly oversaw the Billy Bunkering of all 82 bunkers at The Farm GC in 1999. This is another Fazio design, located in Rocky Face, Ga., which receives close to 70 inches of rainfall a year.

“Our bunkers washed out constantly, and we weren't meeting the expectations of our members,” says Kennelly, superintendent at The Farm from 1994-2002 (he left in April 2002 to become superintendent at Baltimore CC in Timonium, Md.) “We were spend-

ing so much time shoveling bunkers, it was ridiculous. Course Crafters suggested the Billy Bunkers, and it turned out to be a great solution. It's not cheap, but it's an excellent, long-term solution.”

So Billy Bunkers are not for the penny-wise and pound foolish. Pinson also warns that superintendents should check their sand depths in each Billy Bunker at least once a month because “players splash the sand out and if you don't keep your depths consistent, someone will tear the Trevira.”

“Also, you can't mechanically rake the Billy Bunkers or they will rip the Trevira and Enkamat to pieces,” Pinson says. “You have to hand-rake them, but not nearly as often as regular bunkers.” ■

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*Phillips is president of Phillips Golf Media in New Gloucester, Maine. His company represents Course Crafters.*

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