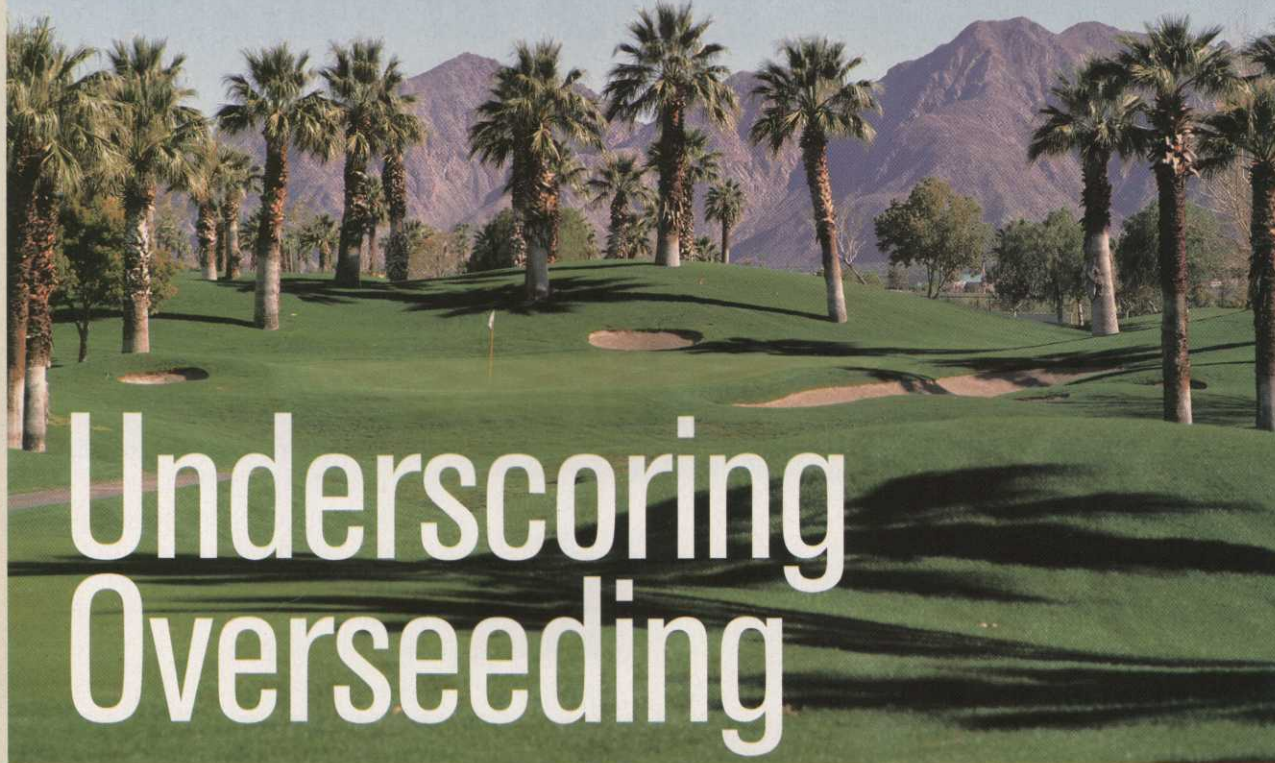


Real-Life Solutions

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.

Frunk "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.

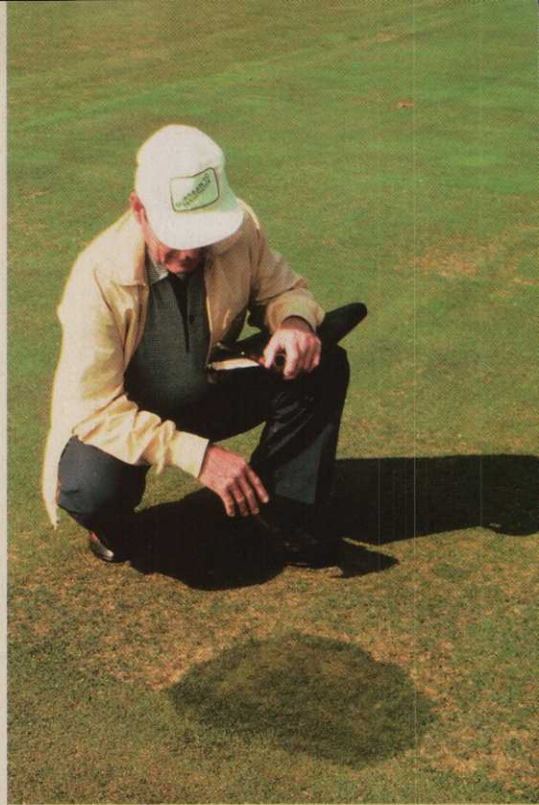
Steve Tubbs, owner and president of Turf Merchants, also expects fine fescue to become popular again in fairway overseeding mixes.

"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

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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.

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

BUTCH GILL,
SALES MANAGER
TURF MERCHANTS

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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 Freyermuth 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.

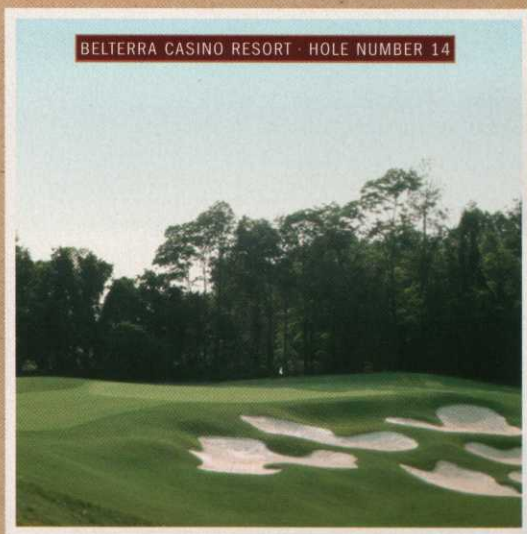
“They're mowing at a little over one-eighth inch and maintaining speeds at 9 feet on public courses where extremely low heights aren't mandatory,” he says. “The daily players are happy with that.”

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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