

Tips

Seeder Selection

It not an essential piece of equipment, but it would make a difference when your greens are thinning or your roughs need to be reborn.

**BY FRANK H. ANDORKA JR.,
MANAGING EDITOR**

There's a piece of equipment you've had your eye on for a while. It's not essential to your job, but it would make a difference when your greens are thinning or the rough needs to be reborn.

It won't necessarily be an easy sell to your boss, however. Unlike a mower, a seeder is not a piece of equipment you'll use every day, and its purchase won't necessarily be inexpensive. So it's important to purchase the right machine.

Golfdom talked to seeder experts and asked them to list the top questions superintendents should ask when considering a seeder purchase.

What are my seeding options?

There are three different types of seeders that superintendents can choose from: broadcast seeders, slit seeders and spike seeders.

Broadcast seeders are the least expensive seeders to buy, but they are also the least accurate, says Ian Camp, general manager for Sisis' North American operations.

"There's more waste when you use a broadcast spreader, and seed is expensive," Camp says. "You have to maximize the soil/seed contact to improve the germination rate."

Camp suggests if superintendents



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use a broadcast seeder, they either shallow-core aerate first with microcore tines or create a tilth with a dethatcher, broadcasting the seed into the prepared seed bed.

Broadcast seeders work best for overseeding bermudagrass during transition or when time is of the essence, says Scott Kinkead, vice president of Turfco. Other seeding options can be more accurate, but they're time-consuming. Ultimately, the goal is to get soil to seed contact.

"[Broadcast spreaders] also work effectively when you're overseeding enormous areas like fairways in a short period of time, and accuracy isn't as important," Kinkead says.

Another option is the slit seeder, where blades on the machine cut slits into the ground, says David Taylor, North American sales manager for Blec. Then a chute drops the seed into

Multitasking machines can make economic sense for superintendents who can't spring for a machine that's exclusively a seeder.

the slit. The goal is to maximize the soil-to-seed contact.

The problem with slit-seeders is that on bigger areas, like fairways, the turf tends to come up in straight lines like a row crop, says Philip Threadgold, vice president for Redexim Charterhouse's North American operations. To minimize the problem, superintendents should slit seed in a figure-eight or cross-hatch pattern. In addition, tight spacing between the blades also limits the problem. Most experts agree that spacing between 1 inch and 2 inches, combined with a more random application pattern will minimize the row look.

The final type of seeder is the spike

seeder, which punches holes into the soil rather than cutting slits, Taylor says. It creates individual seed spaces and can be the most accurate type of seeder available — assuming all the parts are aligned properly.

Taylor says superintendents should also look for spike seeders that will maximize the number of holes punched while putting seed down. “The more holes you have, the better chance you will have of good germination patterns.”

What area are you trying to seed?

Sounds simple, doesn't it? Figure out what area you're going to seed before you decide on a piece of equipment. It's the first question superintendents need to assess before they make a seeding decision, Threadgold says.

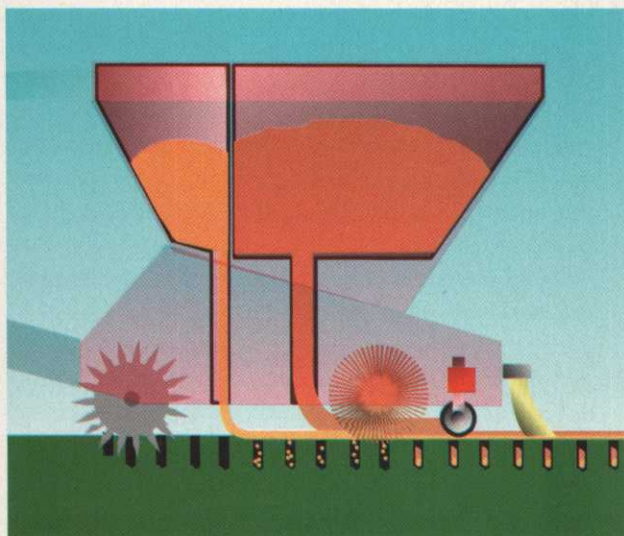
“It's essential that you decide what area you're going to target for your reseeding,” he says. “Roughs may require a different seeder from fairways, and fairways may require a different seeder than greens. It's not an easy decision.”

Kinkead says superintendents need to decide whether their seeder will be used primarily for overseeding, to fill in bare spots on fairways, for a full renovation or for some combination. Perhaps the best use of a golf course's money is to buy a seeder that can fulfill several needs.

Another factor in deciding on which seeder best fits superintendents' needs is the size of the area that's being seeded. It wouldn't make much sense to seed a fairway with the same size seeder that you would use to seed greens, Threadgold says.

For greens and tees, Threadgold suggests using a seeder between 36 inches and 48 inches in length. For fairways, a 60-inch seeder makes more sense.

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A spike seeder randomly disperses seed by punching holes into the ground and dropping the seed in. Some machines also include a brush that ensures the seed makes it into the holes.

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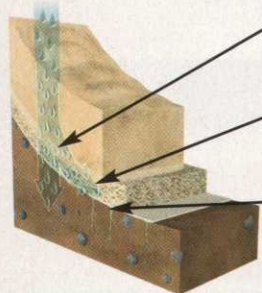
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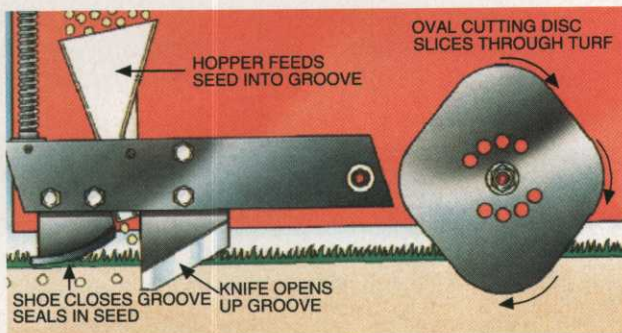
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Tips



Superintendents should look for a seeder that offers accurate metering for all seed sizes and close drill spacing so the seed doesn't end up growing in distinct rows.

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How much seed do you need to put down?

Camp suggests that a superintendent's local seed representative is the best person to advise on a variety of seed and application rates.

Many superintendents, who have been in the business a long time, should be able to do this by using their own knowledge and instincts, but it's better to be safe than sorry, he adds.

"I would always recommend they check with their seed company representatives," Camp says. "You want to make sure that you're putting down the optimum amount of seed."

Kinkead says superintendents should look for machines whose seed regulators — usually in the form of a dial or gauge near the distribution point — are easily adjusted. He also says superintendents should calibrate their seeders each time they use them.

What size seed are you going to apply?

Seed size depends on the variety, and it's important to factor that into any seeder purchase, Threadgold says. Ideally, you'll purchase a seeder capable of handling several different sizes.

"There are some varieties where the seed will be put down like a dust, and others will come out more like a grain," Threadgold says. "You'd hate to purchase a spreader only to discover it couldn't handle the size seed you're planning on putting down."

Some seeders come with attachments — such as brushes or rollers that can increase a seeders' efficiency, Taylor says. Investigate what attachments can be purchased for the seeder to maximize its performance.

Kinkead says superintendents will have to experiment with different seeding options before deciding what works best for them.

"There's no one way out there that will work for everybody," Kinkead says. "Each course will have its own nuances that will help superintendents determine what works best for them." ■