

# Overseeding Overview

USGA agronomists offer advice on what — and what not — to do

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Water restrictions are having an impact on overseeding efforts in the West.

**A**s the overseeding season arrives, the trends USGA agronomists see have them praising some superintendents while offering advice to others.

On one hand, many courses are putting seed down well before the time is right to be green for arriving snowbirds. This could lead to problems throughout the season that extend into the spring transition.

On the other hand, many superintendents have found the newer species of ultradwarf bermudagrasses produce wonderful putting surfaces in fall and early winter, eliminating the need for overseeding.

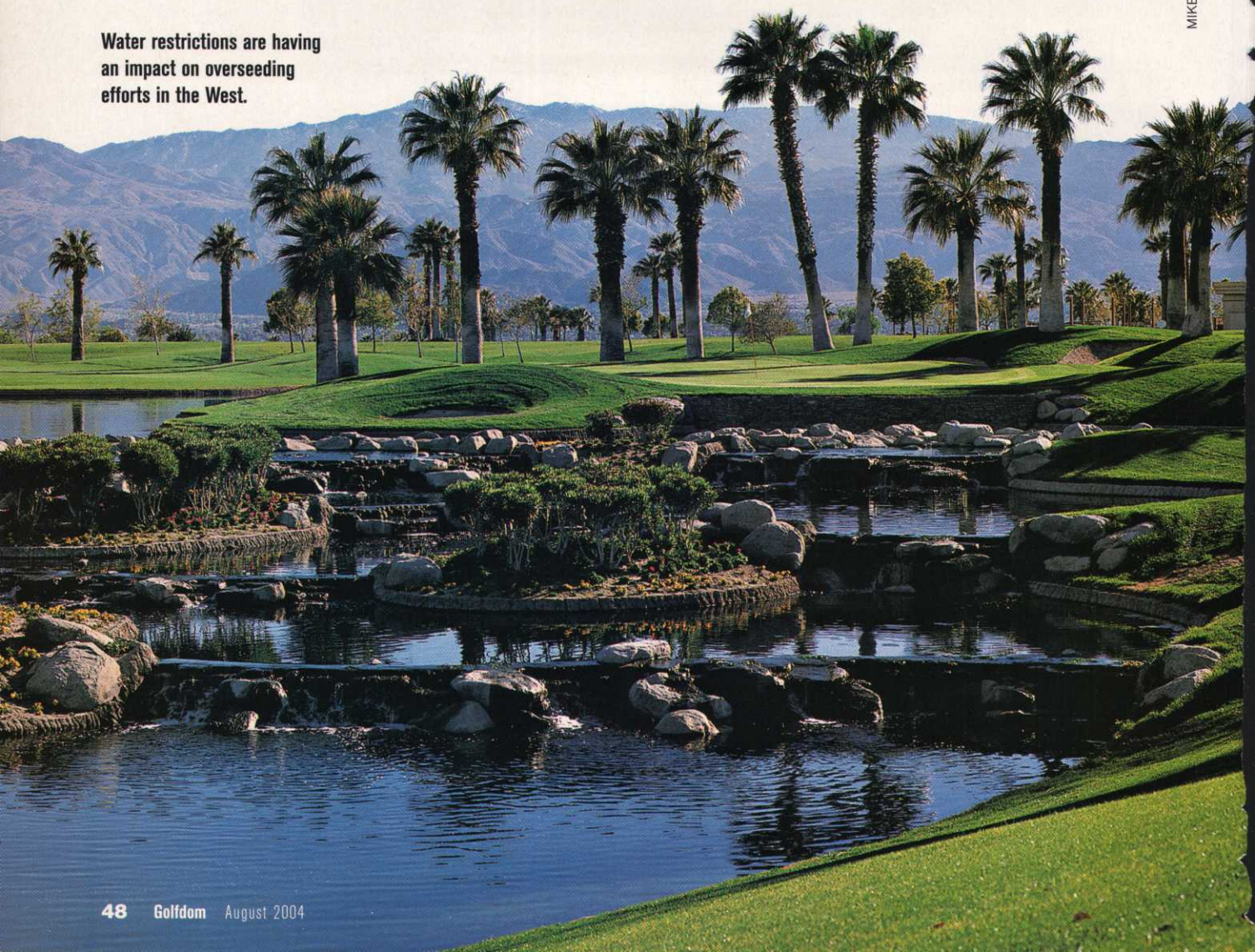
Chris Hartwiger, a USGA agronomist in the Southeast Region, says more courses have already opted against overseeding fairways and tees and are holding off on putting surfaces as well.

“With the ultradwarfs you get color,” he says. “The bermuda is still green but not growing vigorously, and putting improves dramatically.”

Hartwiger said most courses in his area keep excellent green surfaces until Thanksgiving, but adjustments must be made when the frost and cold weather move in later in the season.

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MIKE KLEMM





### Some Las Vegas courses have started to remove turf in an effort to deal with water restrictions and have foregone overseeding.

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"The biggest challenge is being able to raise the mowing height so they don't get too fast," Hartwiger says of the dormant grass.

Late January into February is the toughest time on superintendents as wear starts to show, especially on common bermuda varieties.

"The grass has no recuperative ability," Hartwiger says of the older varieties. "The ultradwarfs have such a thick layer of bio mass that they handle the traffic well."

One huge advantage for the superintendent who does not overseed happens when bermudagrass surges with the return of warm weather. Those superintendents can go directly into their bermuda management practices without worrying about getting rid of overseeded grass, which is competing for nutrients while shading the bermuda.

Hartwiger is still seeing the most overseeding at private clubs where many of the members are vacationing Northerners. "They like to see green grass, and they spend big bucks to belong," he adds.

Some superintendents have taken to sleights of hand to convince golfers that skipping overseeding works. On greens that get too off-color, a little deception might work. "If you're skilled at painting, the average golfer has no idea," Hartwiger says.

Todd Lowe, a USGA agronomist in the Florida Region, says the timing of overseeding is an increasing problem in his area. "Some clubs seed too early and try to get the overseeding established before golfers come back in the fall," he says.

High soil temperatures keep the bermudagrass growing, which outcompetes the new grass in some cases. As a result, the overseeding take can be bad, with sparse areas everywhere. Superintendents then reseed or "dust" to handle the problem, but may just be adding to their woes.

"It can come back and bite you," Lowe says. "This can cause bad transition problems [in the spring] if there's too good a germination."

Even though the weather is unpredictable, Lowe says a good rule of thumb is to overseed the week after Thanksgiving.

Few courses in central to south Florida overseed wall-to-wall. Most Florida layouts refrain from overseeding roughs.

Spring transition problems occur most

often in golf course roughs, especially those that are shaded and/or heavily trafficked. Mowing heights above 1.5 inches in overseeded rough can cause shading.

Lowe says the same number of courses are overseeding as in past years, a trend he wishes would change. "Overseeding is costly and creates problems in the spring, and I encourage most courses to consider reducing or discontinuing overseeding, especially in south Florida," he says.

But Lowe understands the motivation behind overseeding in Florida, especially early. "They're trying to get all greened up before all the golfers come back for the fall season," he says.

So far there have been no water-rate reductions during overseeding periods in Florida. Water-management districts allow increased water usage for two or three weeks during the overseeding establishment, Lowe says.

In the West, the case is just the opposite. Pat Gross, director of the USGA's Southwest Region, says the water situation in parts of the region is dire.

Some Las Vegas courses have started to remove turf in an effort to deal with the restrictions and have foregone overseeding as another way to conserve. "Folks are trying to make some hard decisions," Gross says.

Courses were allowed to water at 7 acre-feet per acre per year, but that was reduced to 6.4 in January. It put superintendents in a precarious position of possibly not having enough water to keep turf alive. Gross says the limit might be lowered again.

Some courses looking to conserve are now overseeding only tees and green banks in an effort to control wear. Layouts in the Tucson and Phoenix areas of Arizona are also under tight water guidelines.

Some superintendents have gone to air seeders, already common in the eastern part of the country, as a means to reduce water usage. The device forces seed down below the bermudagrass canopy. It eliminates the need to rip up the bermuda as well as the heavy watering required as part of conventional overseeding.

If the water trend continues, green and lush will not be adjectives used to describe courses in the off-season, in at least some parts of the country. ■