

Primo at 15

PGR has developed into a vital apparatus in superintendents' turf maintenance toolbox

BY LARRY AYLWARD
EDITOR IN CHIEF

L.B.P. That acronym stands for "Life Before Primo." Charles Joachim, longtime certified golf course superintendent of Champions Golf Club in Houston, remembers L.B.P. as spending a lot of time atop a fairway mower.

"We mowed all the time," says Joachim, noting that his course's bermudagrass fairways never stopped growing in the Texas heat.

And then around 2000, Joachim sprayed Primo MAXX, the popular plant growth regulator from Syngenta Professional Products, on his fairways. Eight years later he's still spraying it every 30 days.

"Because of Primo, we only have to mow it about half the time we used to mow it," Joachim says.

Other superintendents from across the land wax similar anecdotes about Primo, which turns 15 this year. It just seems like last year that the PGR, which slows vertical growth on all major turfgrasses, was registered for use. But it was 1993 when Syngenta (then known as Ciba) registered the product, first called Primo and then re-introduced in 1997 as Primo MAXX with a formulation presenting the active ingredient in a smaller size. In addition to slowing the production of gibberellic acid and reducing clippings by about 50 percent for up to four weeks, Syngenta says Primo also improves turf quality and provides a high level of pre-stress conditioning.

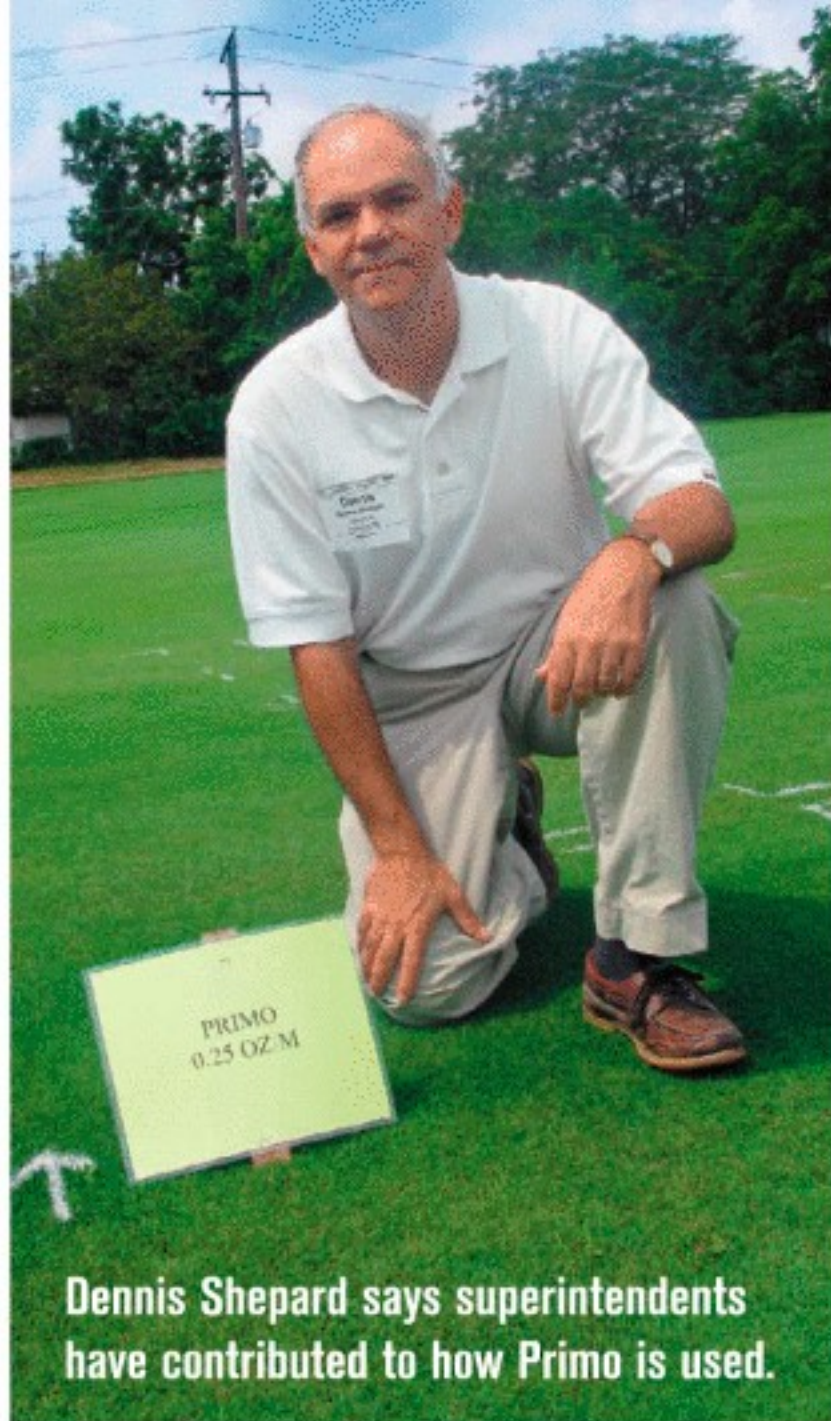
While Primo is 15, it's not as old as the number of years of research that went into creating it — about 20. Dennis Shepard, Ph.D., Syngenta field development manager, says that the success of Primo has been helped by a great partnership between the company, university researchers and turf managers. "The company supported numerous university research projects to better understand Primo's effect on turf," Shepard says. "When the researchers saw how well Primo worked, they developed new ideas for research which continues today."

Shepard remembers when he was in

How many rotors will you need to buy, install, dig up and replace to last as long as one Rain Bird® EAGLE™ Series Rotor?



RAIN BIRD



Dennis Shepard says superintendents have contributed to how Primo is used.

graduate school at North Carolina State University. His professor was Joe DiPaola, Syngenta's previous golf market manager, who was researching plant growth regulators to slow down grass growth and improve turf quality in the process. DiPaola brought his PGR knowledge to Ciba when the company subsequently hired him, Shepard says.

"I have to give Joe DiPaola a lot of credit," says Shepard, who later joined Ciba and worked with DiPaola in developing Primo.

Primo was initially labeled for use on fairways, tees and roughs. Syngenta added greens to the label in 1996. Shepard says superintendents have contributed to how to use Primo. One key suggestion they made was to use it at lower rates more frequently. This is especially true for application to greens where they may spray every seven to 14 days.

Superintendents today use Primo MAXX for myriad reasons, Shepard says. Slowing turf growth is just one reason, and it has ancillary benefits. Repeated applications of Primo MAXX, which can be tank-mixed with all fungicides on the market, will help turf increase stress tolerance and assist fungicide activity, Shepard says.

Scott Nair, superintendent of Kukio Golf Club in Kona, Hawaii, has been using Primo since it was an experimental product in 1992. Nair sprayed

it when he was superintendent at the Boulders Golf Club, a 36-hole complex in Carefree, Ariz., to aid in overseeding. Primo slowed the scalped bermudagrass growth and allowed the seeded ryegrass to transition in. Nair says Syngenta has refined Primo's role in overseeding, and the product has become a solid tool to help superintendents during the overseeding process. Nair now sprays Primo Maxx "religiously" on Kukio's paspalum greens, and says it has helped him achieve consistent green speed.

Dave Ravel, Syngenta's golf market manager, says Primo "took off" after proving it improved turf quality. Over the years, Primo has gained a name and a following for providing labor savings, clipping reduction and turf quality. "Now the buzz is for fuel savings," Ravel adds.

When gas prices began to climb, Syngenta began to research how much Primo could save an 18-hole course in

mowing expenses. Shepard estimates that if bentgrass fairways are mowed an average of four times a week for 25 weeks and bermudagrass fairways are mowed three to four times a week for 30 weeks, the annual fuel savings from eliminating one mowing a week could equal \$3,750. Syngenta estimates a labor savings of \$3,000 with those mowings for a total of \$6,750. With the cost of Primo MAXX at \$5,544, the savings would be \$1,206.

Shepard says Primo has attained as much brand loyalty as any turf product. "People don't think of trinexapac-ethyl," Shepard says, citing the product's active ingredient. "They think of Primo."

Ravel expects Syngenta will celebrate Primo's 25th anniversary in 10 years because superintendents will face the same turf issues then. "I think Primo will be around for a long time," he adds.

For now — happy birthday, Primo. ■

In testing under extreme conditions, Rain Bird® EAGLE™ Series Rotors lasted up to 10 times longer than the next closest competitor's best rotors.

To learn more about the testing, visit www.rainbird.com/NewEagle/index.

