

# Clark Talks Turf

■ TIMELY TURF ADVICE



## → Painting Dormant Bermudagrass Greens

Grady Miller is a professor of turfgrass science at North Carolina State University. Grady's research program addresses a number of topics, including all aspects of painting dormant bermudagrass on golf courses. Miller can be reached at [grady\\_miller@ncsu.edu](mailto:grady_miller@ncsu.edu).

**Q How common is painting dormant bermudagrass greens?** It is fairly common today, with more superintendents choosing to paint greens each year. Once one golf course in an area paints their greens it seems the others tend to follow the next year. The reason is that superintendents and golfers are more likely to consent to painting their greens once they can see for themselves what it looks like at a local golf course.

**Q What are the common threads among golf courses that paint their greens?** Painting dormant bermudagrass greens started at low budget facilities, but today painting is being done on all types of facilities. The amount of traffic on greens during the dormant period is a key question to answer before deciding to paint. If the greens experience wear problems when left dormant without painting, or if wear patterns are present in overseeded turf, painting is not a good idea. Painted surfaces will only tolerate a modest amount of traffic before the bermudagrass wears out.

The idea of painting dormant bermudagrass turf started with sports turf

managers and has moved into the golf industry. Talk to a local sports turf manager for a few tips on painting dormant bermudagrass. I have seen a few golf courses paint their fairways and have talked to a couple of superintendents who are going to try a light rate of seed on their overseeded greens along with painting to provide a good playing surface.

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**Q What has been the response of golfers to painted dormant bermudagrass greens?** Golfers are embracing the idea. Initially there is some trepidation, but after trying it once, most golfers embrace the idea. They experience good putting quality during the winter, a smooth transition in spring and save money by not overseeding. On a year-round basis, putting quality is much better on a golf course that paints versus one that overseeds.

**Q What turf management practices should be taken in fall prior to painting?** Slightly increase the mow-

ing height to provide more leaf surface for the paint to stick to and apply the paint when the grass is still partially green. Partially green turf will require less paint and will look better when painted.

**Q What are your guidelines for selecting a paint?** I prefer the term colorants rather than paint. The products used in the turf industry are more similar to a dye than a latex paint. There are about 25 turf colorants on the market and it is difficult to compare products because there is no standardization in place. Colorants can range from \$400 to over \$1,000 per acre with no guarantees that a higher priced product provides better quality.

**Q How long will a single application of a colorant last?** In most cases, a colorant will last 50 to 60 days. They are primarily degraded by UV light. Rain and cold weather are not major factors in colorant degradation. At most golf courses, colorant is reapplied 50 to 60 days after the first application. A third colorant application is made at a few golf courses.

**Q Anything else?** In most instances it is cheaper to apply a colorant than to overseed. While the initial price of the colorant is expensive, when you compare the cost of seed, water, fertilizer, mowing and labor associated with overseeding, applying a colorant is less expensive. Plus you have more weed control options on a green that has colorant applied rather than overseeded.

Clark Throssell, Ph.D., loves to talk turf. He can be reached at [clarkthrossell@bresnan.net](mailto:clarkthrossell@bresnan.net).