



# Quest For The Holy Grail

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The superintendent's quest for ways to eliminate or control *Poa annua* has reached a fever pitch this season. Only a few localized areas in the north central states experienced winter related injury to turf. Unfortunately, where damage occurred, it was quite severe. For example, considerable losses of *Poa annua* and perennial ryegrass were the result of frequent freeze/thaw cycles during December and again during mid- to late March in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area. Turf covers, even the thick excelsior blankets, failed to provide the degree of protec-

tion superintendents have come to expect in the Twin Cities.

The rest of the region generally experienced a mild winter followed by a cool, wet spring — ideal *Poa annua* weather. It blossomed with an abundant crop of seedheads during May, much to the ire of golfers and superintendents alike. As a result, a number of superintendents, newcomers and old-timers, have pledged that they will dust off long lost containers of Embark next spring and really show that *Poa* who's the boss. After all, Embark is a Type I growth regulator, and it didn't get to be #1 for nothing.

Thinking back on all the Turf Advisory Service visits made to northern golf courses during my USGA experience, I can count on one hand the superintendents that really feel comfortable using Embark to control seedheads; in general, these are some of the most experienced superintendents I know. Timing is critical. Treat too late and you'll get no effect; treat too early, then experience a hard frost, and you and the golfers will see stunted, severely discolored *Poa annua* for quite some time.

Think about it; if Embark provided a simple, risk-free method for seedhead

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suppression, then most superintendents would be on the program each and every spring. Is the risk of injury or discoloration worth the potential benefits of seedhead suppression? Only you can make that decision. Read the label carefully, talk to those with experience using this material, and perhaps, try a practice run on a small area next spring before treating 25 to 30 acres of fairway turf. I would rather not cancel my annual late April fishing trip to Montana next year because "I honestly thought I had more bent in my fairways." But if the need arises, I can always fish during October.

Along the same lines is the other most frequently asked question this spring: "What growth regulator should I use to reduce the amount of *Poa annual* in my greens?" Often the question comes from a superintendent who frequently double cuts at or

below 1/8", rolls greens two to three times a week, keeps the greens quite wet, and makes numerous application of fungicides throughout the season to protect the *Poa*. Why try to control *Poa* with chemicals when the entire management program is designed to encourage the grass you wish to eliminate?

Take the argument one step further. Why try to discourage *Poa* on heavily shaded greens? It is probably the only species adapted to wet, shaded sites, in spite of its shortcomings. If you eliminate *Poa* from a shaded green, the result will likely be a thin, weak, coarse textured stand of bentgrass. The bottom line is that *Poa* control would take an integrated effort — irrigation management, drainage, adequate sunlight, overseeding, aerification, limited fungicide use, a reasonable height of cut, and yes, then perhaps careful use of a growth regulator. Groom for *Poa*, then

try to control it with growth regulators and the result is likely to be a thin, ugly stand of bentgrass.

An informal poll of USGA agronomists from around the country indicates that we have never seen a well documented case where the superintendent took an old push-up green that had a 50/50 bentgrass and *Poa* stand of turf, and then significantly reduced the amount of *Poa* for more than a year or two, using growth regulators. Yes, success can be documented for a year or two, then comes a mild winter followed by a cool, wet spring, and the *Poa* returns to the green with a vengeance. The end result is "back to square one", only now much of the *Poa* is the weak, full-of-seedhead annual biotype. It has happened time and time again; temporary success, high hopes, and then mother nature shows everyone who is the boss. ♣

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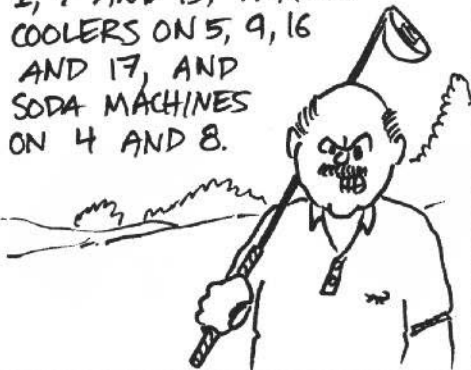
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