

SPLENDOR IN THE GRASS

By Dr. Robert Gray

EDITOR'S NOTE: We are going to enjoy the wit of Bob Gray again this issue. When I tried to contact him for permission to reprint his article, he was in China as part of his duties with the Animal Health Division of American Cyanamid. In his absence, his better half, Ilona, gave a green light to use "Splendor". She is, as previously noted, editor of THE GREENERSIDE, chapter journal of the GCSANJ. Thanks to both.

This is really adult reading, and the warnings requiring the reader to be 18 or older or accompanied by an adult are hereby invoked.

Grass plants, like all living things, must reproduce to maintain the species. Much like humans, age has little to do with a grass plant's ability to reproduce, but its genetics, the environment and the physical condition of the individual plant do. Genetics predetermine whether a species is capable of reproducing without sex, call apomixis, or whether it needs sex, or whether it can reproduce with and without sex. Genetics also determines whether the plant can be cross-fertilized or self-fertilized, or whether the course of the pollen matters at all.

Some species, under certain conditions, can hybridize with other species. Vegetative reproduction is very important to a grass plant's ability to spread out and cover large areas. Rhizomes, tillers and stolons are the usual mechanisms for vegetative reproduction in grasses. Physical condition determines which direction a plant's energy will go toward reproduction, often determining whether or not the plant will produce seed or how vigorous its tillers will be.

All of the sexual action in grasses takes place in the grass flower. The flower of a grass is very small and is found in the part of the plant that is usually referred to as the seedhead. The actual flower is covered by tiny bracts

call spikelets. Unless you really look closely you will not see the usual flower parts. Miniature anthers filled with pollen and a miniature stigma which receives the pollen are all enclosed by these bracts. The seed is actually the fruit of the grass. Some grasses pollinate with their spikelets open, and some prefer to keep it all in the family and pollinate with their spikelets closed.

All of the above is really the basics. Splendor in the grass can take some bizarre turns as well. When it comes to sex, size, timing, and position, all have exaggerated examples in the grass family. Corn is actually a giant grass. The corn kernels on the cob are the grass seeds, and nature has removed the protective spikelets. The corn silks are the stigmas down which the pollen travels. Corn has the largest of everything in the grass family.

Some species of bamboo flowers so infrequently that they are suspected of flowering only once in 100 years, while many common weeds of grass flower all season long.

Although the vast majority of grass species are wind pollinated, in the rain forests of Central America there are grass species that are pollinated with only the assistance of ants. In the Pinelands of New Jersey, a grass species called *Amphicarpum purshii* produces seeds on a seedhead as well as seeds that are produced on underground stems.

With all the reproduction going on, it's no wonder that Mother Nature has cooked up over 7,500 different species of grass. Grass has been put to use as a food crop, as forage for animals, for soil conservation, bamboo for shelter, wildlife management, and, of course, for turf.

The next time you take your mower over the course, you will have a far better appreciation for what you are cutting off! ♣

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(It's about time.)



This Bent's for You? **UNDERSTANDING BENTGRASS PERFORMANCE**

By Dr. Frank S. Rossi
Department of Horticulture
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Historical Perspective

In 1923, United States Department of Agriculture Agristologist, Dr. Charles Piper and Agronomist, Dr. Russell Oakley wrote *Turf for Golf Courses*. In the chapter, The Important Turf Plants, they wrote; "Unquestionably the finest commercial grass for putting greens in the North is Creeping Bent". Back then, "Creeping Bent" was *Agrostis stolonifera* and the seed came from south Germany (hence the name South German Bent). Several other bentgrasses such as Rhode Island Bent (*Agrostis vulgaris*), Browntop or Velvet Bent (*Agrostis canina*) and Redtop (*Agrostis alba*) were also mentioned as grasses used on golf courses. Interestingly, creeping bentgrass became *Agrostis palustris* in the US and remained *Agrostis stolonifera* in Europe. And it is widely thought now that the South German bents were mostly Colonial bentgrasses (*Agrostis tenuis*) with small amounts of creeping and velvet.

Until the mid 1950's, bentgrasses were established vegetatively from the C-series with varieties such as Cohansey, Washington, Congressional and the now infamous Toronto. Establishment by seed meant you planted either South German or Seaside. Then in 1955, Penncross, a seeded bentgrass (the standard by which all future varieties would be measured) was released by Dr. H. Burton Musser of Penn State University. Penncross is quick to establish and recover from injury due in part to its aggressive nature and extensive lateral growth. Penncross seed is produced from the random crossing of 3 vegetatively propagated strains in the field. The next 20 years would see the release of very few bentgrass cultivars, and not until 1978 did Dr. Joe Duich, also from Penn State, release the first serious competitor in Penneagle.

Penneagle is considered less aggressive and more upright than Penncross. As several have written and Dr. Milt Engke said at the last EXPO, many of the management standards and equipment in use today were developed to maintain Penncross.

This year, as part of the 1993 National Turfgrass Evaluation Program (NTEP) we established 28 varieties of bentgrass at the O.J. Noer Facility, twenty-three of which are creeping bentgrass and about 18 that are commercially available. The trials are both at green height, on modified soil (80% sand 20% peat) and native (loamy) soil, and at fairway height. Simply, there has been more activity in the bentgrass development area in the last 7 years than there was in the previous 40 years combined. Primarily this is due to some of the limitations of Penncross, the explosion in golf course construction and renovation that has taken place in the last decade, and the expanded use of bentgrass on tees and fairways.

Domination

As a result of widespread use and domination of Penncross, superintendents have showed reluctance in the use of the new generation of bentgrasses. For many superintendents familiarity with the "Penn" prefix meant they would at least try Penneagle on fairways and then Pennlinks, by 1987, on greens. Additionally, the USGA has been conservative in the recommendations regarding the use of varieties other than Penncross. I can understand this because, as I mentioned earlier, an entire maintenance industry was built to grow Penncross.

If you are renovating greens and have several Penncross (or Penncross/*Poa annua*) surfaces, it will require some alteration of your management program on the newer greens

to maintain a certain amount of consistency. Newer varieties, especially Pennlinks, were developed primarily for use on greens and, like annual bluegrass (its major biological competitor), it has an upright growth habit, fine textured leaves and provides a superior putting surface. Still, the specification of bentgrass varieties for new construction includes vast amounts of Penncross and it is this scientist's opinion that this is no longer the best choice—the domination is slowly ending. In my travels across the country, I see more professionals making their way from Penncross through Pennlinks into the newer varieties.

A Closer Look

New varieties are developed to offer different options that include improved heat and wear tolerance, darker green color, finer leaf texture, upright or lateral growth, and various levels of disease resistance. Also, several varieties have been released just for use on greens such as Pennlinks and 18th Green developed in Canada.

Here's a quick overview based on published reports and results of the 1990-1993 NTEP Trials.

The best performer in the NTEP Trials (both green and fairway/tee) was Providence. Providence was released from my alma mater the University of Rhode Island by Dr. C.R. Skogley (my friend and mentor). For decades Dr. Skogley preserved and cared for the oldest bentgrass plots in the country and always stressed the importance of having a variety that was a consistently high seed producer. Providence is one of the darkest green varieties available, scoring very high in the genetic color ratings. Also, it is fine textured and has demonstrated dense, upright growth. It provided excellent quality in all the trials
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(Continued from page 33)

(fairway/tee and native and modified soil greens) and to date has scored well in our trials at the Noer Facility.

Another excellent performer in the NTEP trials was Putter, a selection from the state of Washington. It performed in the top 10% of all trials with respect to quality and demonstrated exceptional seedling vigor with moderate levels of thatch. It has been promoted as a dark green selection with take-all patch resistance. However, results from the fairway/tee study did not reveal a significant difference between the creeping bentgrass varieties relative to take-all patch and Putter scored in the lower 50% on genetic color. Still, it performed better in the two green trials relative to color and overall quality, which begins to suggest site specificity for this variety.

Middle of the Pack

Cobra, SR1020 and National all scored in the middle of the pack in the fairway/tee trial. However, we have found SR1020 to be more susceptible to dollar spot than other comparable varieties. Seed research may have recognized this fact early in development and introduced a blend of SR1020 and Providence sold as Dominant. SR1020 is the #1 selling grass in Australia, and with Providence make up the most widely used of the new bentgrasses. Currently, we are not recommending pure stands of SR1020 because of the limitations with dollar spot.

The "Penn" series performed from the middle of the pack with Penncross and Penneagle entering the top 5 best fairway/tee varieties for overall quality. Also, Pennlinks ended up in the middle of the pack on both greens trials. In general, these grasses are still reliable and remain valuable "stand by" species, should other varieties not be available.

Sleepers

Several varieties that I would classify as having great potential are Regent for

fairway/tee quality turf. This variety demonstrated exceptional density that did not translate into high thatch accumulation levels. Regent was the top variety in the modified soil (sand-based) green trial over the 5 year period. Other varieties worthy of further look are Viper and 18th Green. Both varieties are the darkest green and finest leaf texture in the trials which can provide both an aesthetic and functional benefit. One could speculate that excellent genetic color, taken in concert with some demonstrated wear tolerance, could result in lower N rates for color without compromising wear tolerance. Interestingly, Viper did accumulate the highest thatch levels in the one location where it was measured.

Schizophrenic Variety

An interesting trend appeared with Pro/Cup, a selection handled by Scotts. This variety was at the top of the fairway/tee list and native soil green trial with Providence. However, it was right in the middle of the pack on the modified (sand-based) green. It is a moderately aggressive, dark green selection with good brown patch resistance.

Pro/Cup demonstrates a point that I have attempted to imply throughout this discussion. With the availability of new varieties developed in a wide range of environments, we may now have specialist bentgrasses that are ideal in specific locations for specific needs.

Southern Man

The increased demand for bentgrass playing surfaces in the southern United States, as far south as Miami, has prompted breeders to develop improved heat and drought tolerant bentgrasses. Currently, the two premier selections that dominated the 1994 market were Cato and Crenshaw, from the Southern Man Dr. Milt Engle. The research conducted with these varieties is very

impressive, including data on rooting, response to high temperature, and species capacity to adjust to drought stress conditions. These varieties were not included in the last round of NTEP trials, but were planted in the latest trial. I expect to have more to say about these varieties, as we learn if there are trade-offs in our cooler region for the improved heat tolerance. Stay tuned.

Decisions, Decisions...

One of the challenges of having more bentgrasses to choose from is how to decide which is best. One way is to read articles like this where the habits of the grasses are discussed. A much better way is to review the results of the NTEP trial from 1990-1993 that was recently completed for fairway/tee and green (modified and native soil) situations. A still better way is to see them growing at the Noer Facility (which you are always welcome to visit) and then look at the NTEP results. However, the best way would be to plant some on your golf course. Set aside an area and plant a nursery, or maybe a new chipping green, or better still a new tee. Conducting your own research will provide you with first hand experience not only with quality but also with management. ♣



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THE PAST PRESIDENTS' CLUB

By Monroe S. Miller

It started innocently enough. Wayne Ertl and I were each enjoying a cold Garten Brau after the July WGCSA meeting last year at the Pumpkin Hollow CC.

It had been a fun meeting. For some reason, a number of past presidents of the Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents Association had chosen to travel to Pumpkin Hollow for comraderie, golf, dinner, a lecture and all the latest gossip. Many were retired and some were gone from the state except for the warm summer months.

The Wayner and I had a ball with them all day long. It was more fun than either of us had in quite a while.

"You know what we should do, Wayne," I asked rhetorically after dinner, "is get all the past presidents together at one time. We could plan and convene the first annual *Past Presidents' Club* meeting.

What I was doing was flapping my jaws together, with little serious thought to actually following through. Wayne felt differently.

"Great idea," he crowed with bubbly enthusiasm. All I could think of was 'how much work could I have gotten myself into?' A lot, as it turned out.

I spent days thinking about following through on such a get together. I wondered long about the purpose of a meeting like this one, whether anybody would be interested, and I even questioned my own intent. In the end, if for no other reason than history, it seemed worth a try. I knew one thing for sure—it would be a daunting task. I decided to try.

I couldn't name all of the survivors and needed help with that and addresses. Using the directory for a guide and the telephone for help, I slowly put together a roster and current addresses.

Sadly, only two WGCSA members who had presided before 1950 were living—Angus McCloud and John Calvin. They were both quite old and had retired out-of-state decades ago.

Angus was living near family in New York, and John had been enjoying the Florida warmth ever since his retirement from Wisconsin.

I learned why there were only two pre-1950 presidents alive. In those times only long-time members who were very senior in both age and service were ever considered for the presidency of our state chapter. It was a stark contrast to these days when so few over fifty even remain in the profession.

Tracking down the 20 living post-1950 past presidents was challenging. Half of them were easy because they were still active in the group one way or another. The rest weren't so fun. I called the course managers at each one's last place of employment for help. Sometimes they didn't know, but offered another lead. I talked to former assistants, club officials, and children (when I stumbled onto a good lead like that). It was nerve wracking. But when all was said and done, I had a list of names and current addresses and, in nearly every case, a telephone number.

I composed a letter of invitation, taking days to write and revise it so the finished product had the best possible chance of persuading 22 very independent past WGCSA presidents to come to the first meeting of the Past Presidents' Club. Since it was my idea, it seemed only right to have it at my club and golf course. The invitations were sent to:

- | | |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Angus McCloud | 1946 - 1947 |
| 2. John Calvin | 1949 - 1950 |
| 3. Les Tompkins | 1951 - 1952 |
| 4. Hal Berg | 1954 - 1955 |
| 5. Lars Finstad | 1956 - 1957 |
| 6. Otto Crandall | 1958 |
| 7. Duffy Mulrooney | 1959 - 1960 |
| 8. Del Donneley | 1961 - 1963
(deceased 1994) |
| 9. Pat O'Brien | 1964 - 1965 |
| 10. Ben Wright | 1966 - 1967 |
| 11. Oscar Bahl | 1968 - 1970 |
| 12. Buddy Meyer | 1971 - 1972 |
| 13. Pete Allen | 1973 |

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------|
| 14. Ben Baxter | 1974 - 1975 |
| 15. Fred Nilson | 1976 - 1977 |
| 16. Nels Jacobsen | 1978 - 1979 |
| 17. Bob Wasserhaus | 1980 - 1981 |
| 18. Stubby Payne | 1982 - 1983 |
| 19. MSM | 1984 - 1985 |
| 20. Joe Stephen | 1986 - 1987 |
| 21. Tom Morris | 1988 - 1989 |
| 22. Frank Mueller | 1990 - 1991 |
| 23. Bogey Calhoun | 1992 - 1993 |

Five days after the invitations were mailed I received my first reply. At first I was surprised—no, delighted would be a better word. But as I thought about it, the word had gotten to many of the guys well before the invitations. Those I had talked to used phrases like "I wouldn't miss it for anything" when I asked if they would attend.

The only griping came from the current president who wanted to come. "Sorry," I replied, "you're not a past yet!" His complaining was very entertaining.

Within two weeks I had a reply from all of them. And they were all—every one—coming to the meeting! I couldn't believe it, probably because I hadn't anticipated nor dared dream of such a wonderful possibility.

The response made me wildly

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happy, but nervous too. Since I had volunteered to be the host, I obviously wanted the course, the meals and the meeting to be perfect for a group of guys I greatly respected and really liked. Preparations for that perfect day kept my spare time occupied weeks before the club meeting.

There were hotel reservations to make and travel arrangements—to and from our course, and to and from the airport and hotels, and everywhere between—to plan. The luncheon menu had to be worked out, the golf arrangements squared away and the evening banquet detailed. No doubt I was driving the clubhouse manager and golf pro crazy. For 22 people. Who are the waitresses working that night? Are they the best? Are there caddies available? Will you have carts free? Our weather consultant was tired of guessing the weather for that day for me. "Will they all really make it to Madison, or will some have a change of heart and mind? Will this be one of those fabled 'he held a party and no one came' situations?" That thought made my palms sweaty.

As it always does, the appointed day came, right on schedule. The weather was excellent—calm and sunny and cool, and not a soul had backed out. "The nervousness won't leave," I told myself, "until they all go home. Then I will be able to relax."

I must admit that the course conditions came together nicely. The outstanding weather helped a lot. There were no surprises of any sort. And since tee times didn't begin until after lunch, our staff had ample time for getting everything mowed, including a late, second cut on the greens. After all, my afternoon customers were pretty discriminating and very knowledgeable.

Cheryl went to the airport to pick up Pat O'Brien and Ben Wright. They had become such good friends while in Wisconsin that they retired to the same neighborhood in Arkansas. The easiest way for them to get here was by plane. We reserved rooms at the Inn Towner Hotel, not far from the course.

It has never been my style to spend much time around the clubhouse and I was a bit uncomfortable doing it today. Members were commenting on my presence—"imagine seeing your here" and "you look pretty good when you get dressed up" and "are you bucking for a job in the pro shop?" It reminded me what a great membership there was and how lucky I was to work for them.

"Just business in the big house," I'd reply.

As is usual with many golf course superintendents, my guests started arriving early, making me glad I had planned for it. I wondered how many of those 21 guests would arrive in pickup trucks. Two were flying in and I didn't count, although I had come to work in a truck! That left 19. Among them about a dozen were still working, leading me to think that they'd all arrive in our favorite transportation.

I was right. Of the remaining seven, a few had trucks. My jaw dropped, however, when Duffy Mulrooney drove into the club parking lot in a mint green Lincoln Towncar! He drove to a far corner of the lot and parked where there wasn't another vehicle within 10 spaces. I walked over to greet him, saying "I hope a bird doesn't get nervous over that tank!" He smiled as we shook hands. I'd heard Duffy had invested wisely his whole life and had retired making more money than he ever had while working.

Before we'd made it back to the clubhouse a car drove slowly by us—a jet black Thunderbird. The electric window came down, revealing a smiling Buddy Meyer with an unlit cigar in one corner of his mouth.

"Where are you parking the expensive cars?" he asked with a widening grin. He reached out for Duffy's handshake.

"Over by the green boat," I told him. "Hurry up—we will wait for you."

Nearly everyone was present by now. The guys were getting their gear squared away in the locker room, nosing around the clubhouse and the Lakeside Room where our buffet was set up.

The thought crept into my mind, despite attempts to resist, that so far this day was off to a perfect start. The conviviality among the past presidents was pretty hard to miss. So far, they were enjoying themselves.

Although they were hardly needed, the main business at lunch was introductions. We went around the tables and each in turn stood to share his present home and what he was doing—working, retired, whatever.

After nourishment and refreshment, Bogey Calhoun took the floor and laid out plans for the golf event. I was busy taking bets on the par threes—first on the fifth and then on the sixteenth. The group comprised seven threesomes.

Among these guys who had spent a lifetime, practically speaking, in golf, the least worry was slow play. They whizzed around the course in short order and headed for the locker room

to clean up. Frank Mueller won the big prize—low gross. But Bogey had a prize for everyone—short drive/long drive, short putts/long putts, most/least putts, farthest from home, most grand-kids, oldest/youngest, etc. It was a masterful job only Bogey could have done.

We gathered back in the Lakeside Room for cocktails and dinner. The pace of conversation was furious! It seemed all were enjoying themselves, which made me happy. The clubhouse manager came in to tell me to get everybody seated so he could begin serving the meal.

After we were at our places, old John Calvin tapped his soup spoon on his water glass, getting everyone's attention. The waitresses paused to see what he wanted. John, speaking slowly but with all absence of nervousness, asked us to bow our heads in prayer. He then gave thanks for the great weather, the feeling of brotherhood and the meal we were about to receive. He also asked Him for safe travel for all of us. John's prayer was unscripted but very appropriate and appreciated. I wished I had remember to provide for it.

It was a Wisconsin meal, all the way. Plates of Colby, Swiss, cheddar and brick cheese were washed down with cold Garten Brau before we were seated. Preceded by a green salad, dinner included a sizzling T-bone steak and a baked red potato. The vegetables included broccoli, carrots and cauliflower. The wait staff poured Wollersheim Prairie Red wine. The food wasn't fancy, but every plate was clean when dinner was over. Dessert was a generous piece of cranberry pudding bread.

Before I could stand and offer a few comments Angus McCloud was up and quickly getting everyone's attention. "I am going to read the names of our departed colleagues who have presided over the WGCSA. When I am done, let us give them a moment of silence."

I wondered to myself, again, how I could have forgotten to make arrangement for a necrology. It was appreciated and touching. Angus read slowly, giving the name and club and date of office for each of the departed of our past presidents.

Then it was Otto Crandall who stood with his wine glass in his right hand. He raised it and offered a toast: "Here's to three of the finest things in the world—the beautiful color of green grass, the pleasure of good friendship

and the unity provided us by the game of golf."

"Here! Here!" was the spontaneous cry from everybody.

Conversation was halted again when Lars Finstad slowly rose from his chair. He is a quiet man but the guys stopped talking when they realized he had something he wanted to say. He began deliberately.

"Helen and I have had a good life. We both were born and raised in Wisconsin, raised our kids here and retired in the state, too. We worked hard but were rewarded with some prosperity." He paused before he continued. I sensed he had something important to tell us and he was thinking about how to say it. He went on.

"We feel like we should share what we have been blessed with. We have thought about this for a long time, consulted with our kids and even the pastor of our church. So here is what we want to do to show our gratitude. We are going to give the University of Wisconsin-Madison Foundation \$200,000 for an endowment fund. In five years the growth should be significant enough that annual earnings can be harvested. We want those earnings to be used for golf turf research at the NOER Research Facility. That part of it is important to me since I knew O.J.

so well for so long. This way others can share in the good life we had in golf course management in our state." Then Lars sat down.

The presidents, especially me, were stunned. Lars hadn't let a word of it out to anyone, so it was a genuine surprise.

We were floored by the sentiment he showed, overwhelmed by the depth of the gratitude he and Helen felt. No one in our state had ever come close to such an expression.

It reminded me of the gift Tuck and Becky Tate made to the program at Michigan State a few years ago. Same kind of people, same feelings, same humble generosity and need to share.

We looked at one another, not quite knowing what to do. Bogey slowly stood up, clapping deliberately. Stubby Payne followed, and then Fred Nilson. Soon we were all on our feet, applauding like crazy and smiling big grins. Lars' face was red and he was looking down. He didn't quite know what to do. But I know he was pleased.

I thought to myself, "this is one of the finest moments in my life." The first ever *Past Presidents' Club* meeting was soon to be history and it was going to be a memory none of these

guys would forget.

Freud once said that there are only two things that make life worth living—love and work. It occurred to me that events this day prove that both are the center of a golf course superintendent's life. There is the love of golf courses and the game and of plants. There is the love of working to produce something that is beautiful and useful and a source of pleasure for so many. There is—dare a man say it?—a kind of affection for other people who love golf courses and labor at making them what they are. The past presidents reaffirmed what I've known my whole working life—these are neat people to know. There is a low level of meanness and a high level of generosity among our colleagues. Lars amplified that tonight.

I wanted this to last forever. I stepped back to one side of the Lakeside Room, watching my guests bid farewell to one another. Lars had a crowd around him as he accepted thanks and congratulations.

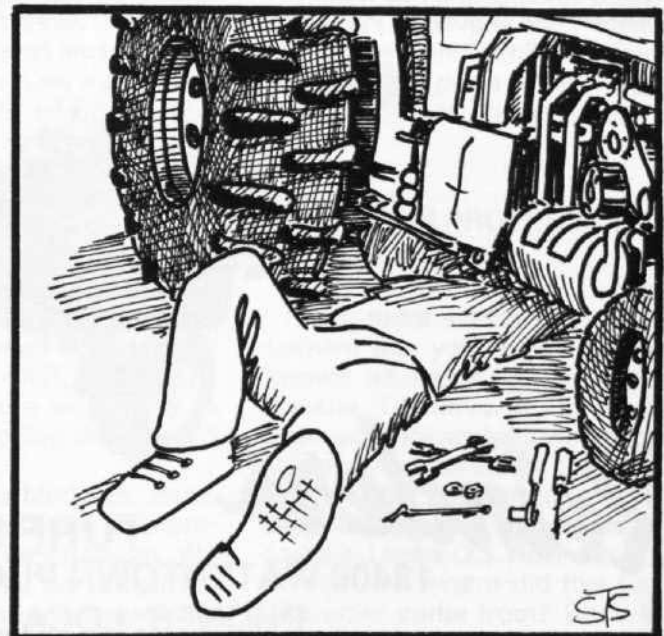
It was too late to try to get anybody's attention. I'd forgotten to ask if they thought we should do this again.

But somehow I knew what that answer would have been. Already I was trying to think about what we could do for an encore. ♣

WINTERTIME for the GROUNDS CREW

PERCEPTION:

REALITY:



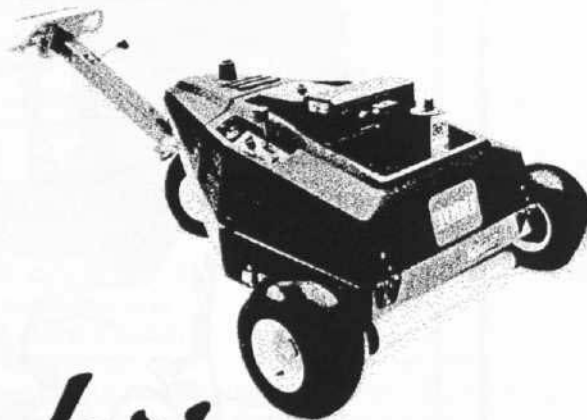
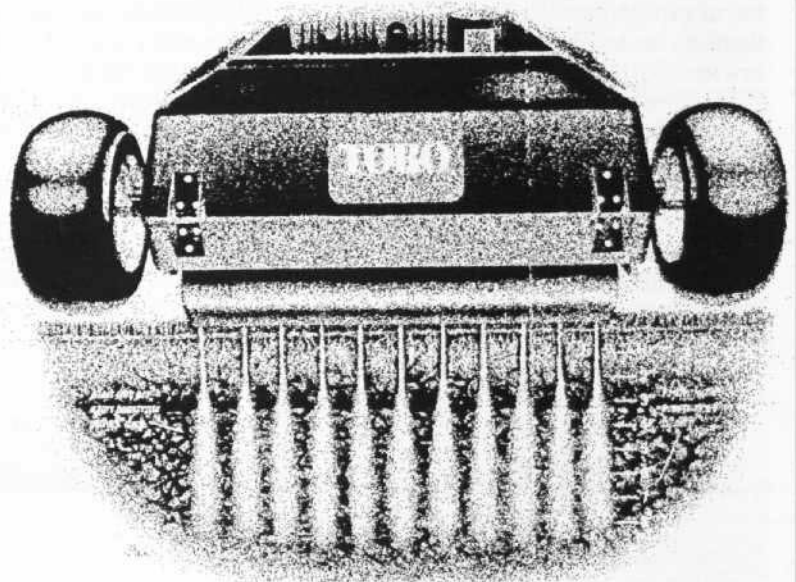
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