Turf Grass Species Facts and Problems

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More and more golf courses are following the trend toward lower fairway mowing heights or returning to higher BLUEGRASS contents in fairways.

With lower mowing heights, you reduce the choices for grasses that will survive in any given turf situation. For instance, at lower mowing heights, BENTGRASS should be the desired species because of its capability to survive at ½" or less. Which BENT to use will depend on the amount of traffic and maintenance programs.

RYEGRASS can be another another grass of consideration for not only lower mowed fairway situations, but as an intermediate grass mixed with BLUEGRASS for a multitude of potential problems. These problems could include lower to higher mowing heights, heavy wear, drought tolerance, rapid establishment and overall disease resistance. The major problem with this concept is the variation in color, texture and growth habits at different times of the year.

BLUEGRASS, on the other hand, can give you the optimum in a turf situation. Newer varieties are available that can be mowed as low as 5/8" for tournament play. With their overall disease resistance, insect resistance, quicker establishment rates, finer texture, better winter hardiness than any other turf species, and dark green color. However, they do have their problems with thatch development, some insect problems, limited disease susceptibility and limits to height of cut.

A concerted effort should be made by overseeding to even out turf areas with the proper grass species, and improve I.P.M. programs.

The concept of overseeding turf is nothing new, but with the advent of newer equipment and newer varieties — which are more aggressive, have better overall disease resistance, better uniformity, and better mowing qualities — the days of damaged or modeled turf are over for the most part. The way to approach this is through overseeding every fall or do split applications by seeding once in fall and possibly seeding again in spring (if needed). Many superintendents realize better turf and reduced maintenance budgets through incorporation of a set amount of dollars per year into their budgets for overseeding. This concept has proven itself time and time again in the fight against POA ANNUA. For instance POA ANNUA needs soil temperatures of 70 degrees for germination while most BLUES and RYES will germinate at 50 degrees or above. As a norm under iced situations, POA ANNUA will only survive for 30 days while most cool season grasses will survive for at least 90 days. During the summer months 104 degree leaf temperatures can create problems with POA ANNUA DECLINE. Recent studies suggest that POA ANNUA DECLINE, LEAF SPOT and ANTHRACNOSE all seem to work together to weaken turf.