Okay, one more time...

Seed It Right, the First Time!

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If you've taken the time during your busy summertime schedule to peek at a calendar, you'll notice that Fall is right around the corner. By the time this article hits the press you'll no doubt be looking forward to fall and a change of weather. But wait just a minute! There's seedin' work to be done! Let's not get so wrapped up in our summer's end daily schedule that we blow right through the famous "Minnesota seeding window."

My guess is that almost all of you have a few seeding projects to take care of this summer. Perhaps you are reseeding a few tees, repairing wear areas at the end of a few cart paths or undergoing a major fairway renovation. It doesn't matter what the job is, how big or how small, it's best to do it now.

Perhaps you have heard or read enough about putting seed in the ground and have had plenty of success in the past. It's this "seed jockey's" opinion, however, that an occasional refresher course never hurts. I grant you, sowing grass seed isn't rocket science, yet too many times it is done incorrectly, yielding disappointing results. So, just as a quick refresher, let's touch on a few important points to increase your chances of doing it right the first time...

Assess and Correct

Before going to the expense and trouble of reseeding an area, assess the site for conditions that attributed to the problem in the first place. Is shade a problem? Is the soil compacted from overuse? Does proper drainage exist? Is there excessive standing water present after a rain or irrigation cycle? How's your soil pH and soil texture? Are you using the proper type of grass seed suitable to the intended use and your level of turf management? Address and correct all possible concerns prior to seeding to make sure you won't be facing the same problems next year and beyond.

Sow No Seed Until Its Time

The famous "Minnesota Seeding Window." Live by it or be prepared to accept the consequences! I'm not saying you can't achieve good establishment results by seeding outside the window. Spring, mid-summer or even dormant seedings can be highly successful. That is if everything goes right. If the rain falls on cue, the crabrass doesn't germinate (cold day in h---) and the heat and high humidity stay south you've got it made. But the chances of that happening are about as remote as a whole summer of rain-free weekends.

The famous seeding window seems to have shifted slightly in recent years. No longer does August 15 to September 15 match our optimum seeding time in Minnesota. In the southern part of the state mid-September is still acceptable. Obviously, as one moves northward the window closes sooner. In the Twin Cities metro area a more realistic seeding window would begin August 1 and extend through Labor Day. An early September seeding is still safe, however. In Northern Minnesota seeding is best done from mid-July through mid-August. After Labor Day anything can happen in the North Country!

The seeding window can be altered slightly or perhaps totally ignored if you are blessed with a reliable irrigation system and carefully select the proper grass seed varieties. Faster establishing varieties are a must if you are seeding late into the fall and battling the odds of a killing frost getting the best of your new seeding. The benefits of an irrigation system both during and after seed estabishment are numerous. Being able to control the frequency and the amount of water your turf receives will more than pay for itself over time. Without it, establishing and maintaining quality turf is a hit or miss proposition.

One more word of advice relative to seeding outside the window. For those of you who have no choice but to seed in the spring, I strongly recommend applying siduron (Tupersan) at the time of seeding to reduce severe crabgrass and annual grassy weed competition. The stuff isn't cheap, but it will greatly improve your chances of ending up with a solid, pure stand of desirable grasses instead of a monostand of crabgrass. Without Tupersan and irrigation, a spring seeding can yield disastrous results. Don't say I never warned you!

The Right Tool for the Right Job

Regardless of what method you choose to place seed into the ground, there is one very important principle to which you must adhere. In order to attain good germination and establshment you must achieve good seed-to-soil contact. Without it, you may as well throw seed to the wind. Seed-to-soil contact is easy to accomplish when seeding into bare ground. Gravity generally takes over and, bingo, the seed hits the ground. The task becomes a bit more of a challenge when overseeding into existing turf. Consequently, seeding failures typically occur when an attempt is made to overseed rather than when seeding initially.

For use on new seedings a broadcast spreader will do very nicely in smaller areas. You must follow up by raking or pressing the seed into the soil to anchor the seed, minimizing erosion and maximizing good soil contact. For larger areas, a tow-type primary seed such as a Brillion or LandPride will give optimum results by making one pass, although two passes would be better. Primary seeders like these will cover larger areas quicker and will meter the seed into the soil more accurately, saving you seed and

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money. The roller packers located on both machines press the seed into the soil, assuring good seed-to-soil contact. If you expect to do a lot of new seedings in the years to come you may want to consider purchasing a primary seeder. It'll save you money — lots of it.

Another method of seeding that has become more popular in recent years is hydroseeding. Hydroseeding makes the most sense when seeding very large areas or terrain that is difficult to traverse with conventional seeding equipment. You also have the unique ability to tank-mix seed, fertilizer, mulch and tackifiers. This concoction can then be applied in one application.

Overseeding into existing turf is much more challenging than seeding into bare ground. Getting through all that thatch and foliage in an attempt to reach the soil is very critical to assure seed germination. If the seed is left on the turf surface or nestled into the thatch the only ones that will be happy are the birds. The key to a successful overseeding starts with using the proper equipment. The most effective method is seeding with a slit seeder. Several brands of slit seeders are available, offering many different features. They all accomplish the same basic thing, however. They effectively penetrate through the turf foliage and thatch and place the seed in contact with the soil.

If you do not have access to a slit seeder, an alternative method would be to power rake and aerify the area, broadcast the seed and follow up by raking or dragging a mat over the seed, thus working it into the exposed soil and into the aerification holes. It's not as effective as slit seeding but it can be a viable alternative.

Select the Proper Seed Mixture

No doubt the most important factor in choosing a seed source is to pay close attention to seed quality. Both germination percentage (85% minimum) and seed purity (low crop and weed seed and inert matter percentages) are important specifications to check. Seed lots that have a low purity and/or germination percentage should be avoided. They will only yield poor results and create a need to go back and reseed areas as a result.

Plant preformulated grass seed mixtures and blends rather than individual varieties. Doing this will broaden the turf's resistance to turf disease and insect infestation. It will also improve turf quality by expanding the mixture's ability to perform better under varying degrees of shade, traffic, soil types and management levels.

"What type of seed mixture or blend should I use?," you ask. Let's face it, there are as many different varieties of seed these days as there are brands of soap. Choosing the mixture that is best suited to your needs can be confusing. To make the selection process a bit easier, ask yourself these few questions:

- Does the area I'm seeding receive a lot of traffic?
- Is rapid establishment important to me?
- Is fast recovery from wear important?
- Do I have shaded areas to contend with? How heavy is the shade?
- What are my soil types? Soil pH?
- What is the expected level of maintenance?
- What are my turf quality expectations?
- Will there be an irrigation system installed?

Trying to find a grass seed mixture that will best match the answers to your questions above can be difficult. However, taking the time now to decide what mixture best fits your situation will only save you money, time and a lot of headaches down the road. No one grass seed mixture or blend will fit all you seeding needs. Determining what your basic needs are will allow you to intelligently select the two or three mixtures or blends that fill all your requirements.

Aside from a steady diet of bentgrass, the mixtures and blends that you will use will consist of three basic turfgrass species, Kentucky bluegrass, perennial ryegrass and the fine fescues (creeping red, chewings, hard and sheeps). A few grasses to stay away from altogether — tall fescue, redtop, timothy, bromegrass and wheatgrass. They have absolutely no place in a turfgrass setting. If you're seeding medians or ditches, have at it, but keep them away from groomed areas where aesthetics are important.

For reliable recommendations relative to turfgrass selection and establishment techniques, contact your local extension agent or turfseed supplier. Both are excellent sources of information regarding the industry's newest and best adapted varieties as well.