

This Ain't Your Daddy's *Poa Annua*

By **RON FURLONG**

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Had you cornered me a few years ago and told me that someday, in the near future, I'd be assisting in the management of a golf course swimming in a sea of *poa annua* (greens, tees, fairways, rough, everywhere!), and that there would be absolutely no alternatives to this, I'd have thought you a bit nuts. However, nearly through my first year out here in the Pacific Northwest, I can safely say my attitude has indeed changed.

Having spent the better part of the past decade in attempts at eradicating this "weed," as we called *poa*, from the Twin City courses I worked at, it took a serious change of heart for me to actually accept this "grass" and, indeed, help it flourish.

The managing of *poa annua* in the Seattle area is certainly, without a doubt, the most drastic difference I have encountered in the managing of turf in the Pacific Northwest compared to back home. (I think I will always call Minnesota home, even if I were to stay here another 30 years). Although a close second would be the fact that in January we're actually cutting cups and mowing greens compared to . . . well, you know what is happening at Minnesota courses in January. The word "managing" *poa annua* is the key. At many courses in the Midwest we're trained to a certain extent to hate *poa annua*. To fight it. To never give in. To *control* it. At The Wilds we had *poa annua* alerts if anyone ever spotted a single blade of the evil substance amidst our pure, unblemished acres of Penn Links. Okay, I'm exaggerating a bit, but I think I've made my point. In Minnesota, if you have the means to control *poa*, you control it. However, here, talking about controlling *poa annua* (a mistake I made when I first arrived) is bound to get smiles and a few chuckles from the locals, and the knowing, obligatory shaking of the head slowly. This is not to say that there are not newer courses in the northwest that make attempts, some successful, at growing colonial bentgrass on their greens and tees. However, on mature courses, like the one I work at — Everett Golf and Country Club — which is as mature as they get at 90 years old, *poa annua* is simply a fact of life.

The truth of the matter is, once one accepts *poa annua*,

you begin to realize that growing a quality *poa annua* green is no more difficult here than growing a Penncross creeping bentgrass green in Minnesota. And with a fairly similar quality. All one needs to do to find proof of the potential quality of a *poa annua* green is to look at two of 1998's three major championships played in the U.S. The greens at both The Olympic Golf Club, site of the '98 U.S. Open, and at Sahalee, site of the '98 PGA Championship, are *poa annua*. Sahalee, a neighboring Seattle course, is similar in many respects to Everett Golf and Country Club (EGCG). Both courses are tight, mature layouts, flourishing amidst literally thousands of towering Douglas Firs. Though at only 100 acres ECGS could only dream of hosting such an event as the PGA Championship, we face most of the same trials and tribulations that Sahalee faces, including

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the managing of our *poa* greens.

In the Pacific Northwest, *poa* is seen commonly as a winter annual. After flowering and seeding, the annuals die, leaving dormant seed behind to germinate when moisture returns (moisture is definitely not a problem here from October through April). Mature courses tend to have more favorable, higher quality types of *poa* than the newer courses in this region. Studies have shown as many as 20 different biotypes of annual bluegrass may exist on a single putting green. Another fact that makes *poa annua* a good grass for a putting green is the high shoot densities. As Dr. David R. Huff pointed out in a recent USGA article, a quality Penncross creeping bentgrass green will have about 200 to 250 tillers within a square inch, compared to a similar healthy *poa annua* reptans green which may have as many as 1300 shoots in the same area.

Our greens management program here at ECGC, instituted by CGCS Randy White, is similar in many respects to that of a Midwest program. A spring and fall aerification and topdressing; light topdressing throughout the year, about every third or fourth week; a verticutting and spiking program in the summer; occasional hydroject aerification throughout the year, as well as occasional solid core tining; a sound fertility program, and the mad scramble during the hot months of July and August to keep the deli-

cate grass alive with proper irrigation. There are, of course, many differences as well. We are not hit with pythium or dollar spot here, but instead anthracnose and fusarium reign terror. No cutworms, but the European Crane Fly is a nasty little replacement (crows love to peck at the greens looking for the larvae). But here, like anywhere, golfers want speed (we roll twice a week in the summer months) and conditions just like those they saw on television on Sunday. The Augusta syndrome. Some problems are, alas, universal.

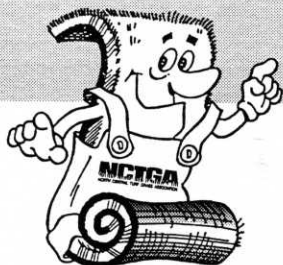
Most are aware, of course, of the testing done over the past few years at the University of Minnesota by Donald White, Ph.D., which has actually produced a *poa annua* reptans (creeping bluegrass) seed for sale on the market. DW 184. According to White, once established, DW 184 produces very few flowers, is dense, upright, dark green and has displayed good resistance to a variety of diseases. Still, convincing someone in Minnesota that *poa annua* is the answer for them may as yet be a hard sale. Some ways are hard to change, and certainly being forced into the change, as I was when I made my move to the Seattle area, was an easier way of facing up to this conversion. I simply had no choice. Yet, even in Minnesota, I think one has to look at the situation with an open mind and say to oneself, is this the way to go? Should I suddenly embrace something I have spent so long trying to eliminate? Time will tell.

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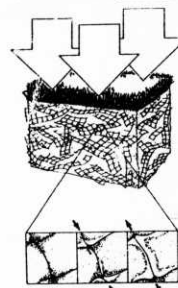
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