

POA ANNUA MAINTENANCE - HOW TO KEEP IT

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Poa annua without question is one of the most interesting and controversial grasses available to the fine turf field. It offers great challenge, principally to golf course superintendents on northern courses. Whether they choose to eradicate or maintain Poa, it is in either case a formidable challenge.

Poa annua became a significant problem on golf courses after irrigation systems were first installed and golfers began to demand closer cut turf. It was quick to spread and in fact was encouraged because it provided a beautiful playing turf for several months of the year, principally in spring and fall. It has often been said, "When Poa annua is right it provides the best turf surface for golf that we have." Therein lies the incentive for most superintendents who have accepted the challenge to maintain it. Some of the characteristics that Poa annua displays that are "right for golf" are: It is an attractive plant in spring, winter and fall, its foliage resembles the low-growing Kentucky bluegrasses; it forms a dense turf; it thrives at mowing heights from 1/8 inch on up to its full height if left uncut; it produces a good supply of viable seed under any height of cut, assuring self-perpetuation; it grows well in the sun or shade; it grows well under moist conditions; it is quick to germinate, rehabilitate and re-form a turf naturally when conditions are right; it affords an excellent lie for summer rule play; its upright habit of growth and strong blade keeps the ball from "nestling down" in the turf.

My role is to bring to you personal experiences and observations in visiting clubs in the Eastern Region as a result of the USGA's Green Section Visiting Service, and to propose a program designed to maintain Poa annua. These would be the strong phases of my Poa annua maintenance program.

Normally Poa annua starts growth earlier in spring than the bentgrasses; it also grows longer into the fall and winter. This makes it important to plan management practices to get the most benefit for Poa annua at these times. This includes:

- (1) Begin to irrigate early in the spring, before the permanent grasses begin to grow; also, irrigate more in the early fall.
- (2) During the summer stress period syringe daily as needed. If you can't syringe fairways because of irrigation system limitations water daily, preferably in early morning.
- (3) Fertilize early in the spring. In the fall fertilize late enough to miss the prime time for permanent grasses but not so late that the Poa annua goes into the winter in a lush condition. Don't overstimulate the Poa annua at any one time; fertilize well, however, in light, frequent applications. Include liberal amounts of phosphorus in fertilizers selected.

(4) Lime adequately to bring the pH to the slightly acid level. Between 5.5 and 6.5 is most desirable.

(5) Cultivate the turf thoroughly each spring and fall to encourage germination of new Poa annua seedlings. New seedlings seem to stand stress adversity better than older plants. Mow turf close in spring and fall to give seed and seedlings growing room.

(6) Follow a good disease control program in the attempt to get the Poa through the summer and winter stress periods especially. Include systemic fungicides in your program. They produces outstanding results in keeping Poa better through a very difficult '71 summer season in the East. Be sure to follow a strong snow mold program in winter as Poa annua is very susceptible to this affliction. Higher rates of fungicide needed for snow mold control on Poa annua.

(7) Be very careful in selection and use of herbicides. Use good judgment in rates applied and in timing. Be sure that you do not use herbicides that may have a delayed effect on Poa annua during periods of stress. 2, 4-D, 2,4,5-T, Dicamba, the pre-emerge herbicides are examples of possible trouble. Spotspray where possible.

(8) Follow a good insecticide program, especially if the Hyperodes weevil (annual bluegrass weevil) is present.

(9) Improve drainage in areas of poor air circulation.

(10) Improve soil drainage where severe problems exist. Poa annua will volunteer when permanent grasses are killed-off because of poor drainage, but if the drainage is not improved no grass will survive continuous "wet feet." "Wet feet" will cause serious winter problems with Poa annua.

(11) Follow a preventative program of wilt control. The wetting agent and phenyl mercuric acetate formulations have been effective where judiciously followed.

(12) Be sure to guard as best as you can against winter injury problems. If ice layers remain too long or if desiccation is a problem, a lot of Poa annua could be lost.