

Is Poa Annua Good or Bad?

By JOHN MORLEY, President
The National Association of Greenkeepers of America



John Morley

POA ANNUA (Annual Meadow Grass) is usually looked upon as an exceedingly troublesome weed, and is noticeable as being the plant which infests our garden paths, and appears capable of growing everywhere and under almost all conditions. It is constantly the subject of somewhat heated conversation and correspondence, many claiming that its appearance year after year proves it to be a perennial and not an annual. It is quite correctly named, however, the explanation being that the plant is continually re-seeding itself from April to October.

To this fact is also due its amazing power of spreading in every direction, the seed being constantly blown about by the wind. The plant produces seed in a shorter time than any other species of grass, and it even flowers when owing to the sterility of the soil it cannot attain to more than one or two inches in height. Poa annua owing to its power of resisting drought, is of considerable value in hot and dry climates. An effectual method of checking it is an application of common salt once or twice a year.

Poa annua is recognized by its light green color, its soft texture, the tendency of the leaves to curl towards the middle or center, and they often crumple near the base.

Shall We Grow It or Kill It Out?

At the present time there is a good deal of discussion among officials of golf courses and greenkeepers as to the merits or demerits of poa annua. But very little information has been obtained from any of our leading agronomists upon this particular grass. During the past two seasons I have received a number of inquiries as to how to get it to grow into the putting greens, and where can poa annua seeds be obtained. Others have written asking advice how to get rid of it. But I must confess that there is not much information to be obtained relative to the eradication of poa annua, and what little knowledge we have possessed has been through practical observations.

While it is true that poa annua is classed with the poa grasses, yet we can call it a troublesome weed. However, if properly treated and its environments carefully studied it will produce the finest turf for putting greens, but it is very treacherous and should be handled only by experienced greenkeepers.

Poa Annua and Bent Combined

Poa annua often produces good results the entire season providing the putting greens have a large percent of the various bent grasses produced from seeds, for the reason that when the poa annua has spent its force as the leading grass in a putting green, which often occurs in July and August, the bent grasses which appear to thrive in extreme hot weather take the place of the poa annua. The most critical period of this grass is when it is arrived at a dormant stage. If we can create conditions at this period to allow the change to become slow and to allow the bents to gradually take the place of the poa annua very little trouble if any will occur. But I have observed that a heavy application of sulphate of ammonia or any fertilizers rich in nitrogen has a tendency, especially about the middle of summer, to eliminate the poa annua before the bent grasses take its place, which often leaves the putting greens in a deplorable condition.

Air Circulation Most Important

During the change I am of the opinion that the three principal facts to be borne in mind during the hot summer weather as it pertains to poa annua are not chiefly fertilization, but moisture, temperature and air. To illustrate this we are informed that when any plant seeds or flowers it is an indication that it has received sufficient food. So by observing the seeds of the poa annua we are in a position to judge the condition of the plant. If the blades, stems and seeds are in a good healthy condition it shows that the various foods, moisture, temperature and air are well balanced.

If on the other hand the general appearance is sickly then something must be done to correct the conditions that exist where poa annua predominates, or in other words if the putting greens contain more than 60 per cent of poa annua. I am of the opinion, especially during extreme hot weather, that air in the soil is more important than water. For if deprived of water in hot weather for a long period the roots of old grass will frequently survive, although the leaves and stems in a drought may turn completely brown, while if deprived of air and completely immersed in water in hot weather they will die in a few days. Especially with an abundance of poa annua, its packed and matted roots often

prevent the air from freely entering and leaving the soil.

I am of the opinion that the putting greens that are mostly poa annua would be helped to some extent by using a spiked roller which would have a tendency to give the roots of the plants more air. In fact I have found it very beneficial to our putting greens where poa annua is the dominant grass. There are a number of complaints with poa annua relative to making the surface of the putting greens bumpy, especially while it is seeding heavily.

To a certain extent this can be prevented by clipping the grasses real short. We used to take off the rollers from the putting green mowers, and with the aid of two men every once in a while shave the surface of the putting greens. But with the advent of better putting green mowers this method is not essential.

Poa Annua Thrives on Rich Compost

The question is often asked—"Why is it that we get more poa annua on one green than we get on another, both of them situated close together upon our course?" We find that some of these putting greens contain about ten per cent of poa annua while others contain forty per cent, and we have one with over eighty per cent. We give all of the putting greens the same care and treatments. Now the chief reason that I may give is simply if the various bent grasses predominate in a putting green they will eventually drive out the poa annua, but on the other hand if poa annua is the leading grass it will crowd out the bents. If we could maintain conditions suitable for good putting on the greens by using nitrogen fertilizer so that the gases from them would remain close to the surface, and eliminate top dressing for a while which contains a large amount of nourishment, we would to a certain extent help to starve out some of the poa annua. For I am of the opinion that when the humus that the compost contains is washed down into the soil it is feeding the roots of the poa annua which usually are two inches deep in the soil, and very little is feeding the roots of the bents which remain close to the surface. This is one of the chief reasons that in a reasonable time so many greenkeepers have observed the rapid increase of poa annua after continual top dressing with rich compost.

We find that poa annua is a difficult grass to keep during the winter months for the reason should the surface of the putting greens be covered any length of time with ice, most of the blades of grass disappear and in the spring this leaves the putting greens in a bad condition. I have to a certain extent benefited poa annua greens by placing on them in the late fall a dressing of coarse tobacco stems and removing them in the spring when the danger of heavy freezing weather seems to be over.

Eradicate on First Appearance

To attempt to eradicate poa annua by digging it out of well established putting greens would require a large outlay of money and time. And the only thing left for a greenkeeper to do is to know how to keep it in a healthy condition. I have observed that poa annua is one of the first grasses to catch the brown-patch disease.

I find that there is a great tendency by some greenkeepers to encourage poa annua on new vegetative putting greens, but I am of the opinion that they are making a mistake. In my observations I would suggest that as soon as it appears upon the putting greens to eliminate it. Don't give it a chance to get a start for if you do it will not take long before it crowds out the grasses made from creeping bent stolons.

Poa Annua Often Spread by Players

Where poa annua is well established on a golf course I find that it produces one of the finest turfs for tees. For instance upon our No. 1 and 10 tees there has been no necessity to use any grass seed of any kind in the past ten years, nor have we been compelled to re-sod any part of them. All we need to do is to fill the divot holes with compost and they heal themselves. But do not let this encourage you if you have no poa annua on your course for in importing it for your tees it would soon reach your putting greens either by winds or by the players carrying it on their shoes when wet.

Don't Plant Poa Annua Purposely

By all means if you are not well versed with the culture of poa annua *leave it alone*. Seldom a day passes that I am not asked how I cultivated our No. 17 putting green which is chiefly poa annua and which is admired by all who have played upon it. Against my advice I have seen chairmen of Green committees take home to their respective courses clippings containing the seeds from this putting green. A short time ago my attention was called to the fact that one of our leading seed merchants was drying seeds from poa annua clippings, because there had been a number of orders asking for this seed. This dealer has at the present time a reputation for handling the best grass seeds that can be obtained. If he deals in poa annua I am inclined to believe he will lose some of it.

The Story of Youngstown Number 17

Again the question is asked where did I get the poa annua seed for No. 17 putting green, and why did I plant this kind of seed especially when I warn others not to use it as I considered it dangerous to do so.

Here is my answer—several years ago this putting green, like a few more on our course, was always acting poorly. So one fall we decided to rip the putting green with sharp steel tooth garden rakes, and broadcast over

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Where The Big Tournaments Will Be Held

July 11—British Open Championship at **St. Andrews**, Scotland.

July 18-23—Western Golf Association Amateur Championship at **Seattle Country Club**, Seattle, Washington.

July 27-29—Buffalo District Golf Association Championship at **Wanakah Country Club**, Buffalo, New York.

August 2-6—United States Golf Association Public Links Championship at **Ridgewood Golf Links**, Cleveland, Ohio.

August 17-18—Irish Open Championship at **Portmarnock**, Ireland.

August 22-27—United States Golf Association Amateur Championship at **Minikahda Golf Club**, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

September 1-3—New York State Golf Association Amateur Championship at the **Oak Hill Golf Club**, Rochester, New York.

September 19-24—United States Golf Association Women's Championship at the **Cherry Valley Club**, Garden City, Long Island.

September 28—French Open Championship at **St. Germain**.

November 21-28—Professional Golfers' Association Championship at **Cedar Crest Country Club**, Dallas, Texas.

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the surface creeping bent grass seed of which at that time there was plenty of good quality on the market. Not the kind that we get now. We thought we were dealing with a reliable seed house and at that time very few greenkeepers, including myself, knew very much about golf course grass seeds especially suited for putting greens. Instead of getting what we ordered most of the grass turned out to be poa annua.

It has been often stated that No. 17 green is my favorite green. This is not so, all my putting greens get my individual attention. But I am compelled to nurse it more than any other, otherwise it would soon be in an unplayable condition.

Our Message to You

Some of you have seen Bent Nurseries, we wish you could all see ours.

More than five hundred greens will be planted with our Improved Washington Strain of Creeping Bent this fall.

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