

Golf Grasses

By LYMAN CARRIER

Editor's Note:—Mr. Carrier was for many years connected with the U. S. Department of Agriculture, as agronomist in pasture and forage crop investigations. His work with the U. S. G. A. Green Section established the value of vegetative creeping bent for putting greens.

WHILE this subject has been quite thoroughly covered in the past few years in this and other publications, it is one which, so long as we stick to known facts, can not be over-discussed. The species of grasses which have been studied and classified by botanists number well up in the thousands. Then there are countless strains and varieties among the different species. But when we come to the sorts which make really fine turf suitable for golf course purposes or nice lawns in any particular locality, they may be counted on the fingers of one hand. As it is necessary to start somewhere, we will take up the fescues in this issue.

Fescues

The fescue group of grasses contains quite a large number of species, only a few of which have any economic importance. They range in texture from the finest of all grasses to coarse broad-bladed, farm sorts used for hay. The fescues which are of interest to golfers can be identified without much trouble by their narrow, thick leaves which resemble stiff, coarse hair.

Red Fescue

The most important of this group from a fine turf standpoint is red fescue. It is often called Chewings fescue and various other names depending on where the seed comes from. The seed of red fescue is imported into this country from Central Europe, New Zealand, and Australia. There is very little if any difference in the quality of turf produced by the seed from these different sources. Fescue seed loses its vitality rapidly after it is a year old and it is generally considered that the European grown seed has a better germination on account of the shorter ocean trip to get it here.

The true red fescue (*Festuca rubra*) is a creeping grass spreading by stolons into a close fine mat. It is evidently this creeping strain that grows on many of the older courses of Scotland which has made red fescue famous. I have occasionally found the true creeping red fescue on golf courses in this country but the matting habit develops so long after seeding that I have never been able to trace the source of the seed used in these cases. The Bob-O-Link Course north of Chicago has large areas of true creeping red fescue on its fairways and it is wonderful turf. Many thousands of dollars have been wasted in a vain endeavor to duplicate these nice patches of turf as practically all of the seed marketed in this country is of the non-creeping sort. From all

accounts creeping red fescue is quite common in Europe. It is likely, however, that it has lost its seeding habit. Many plants which have developed an ability to propagate themselves vegetatively by stolons, tubes or rootstalks give up the effort to produce seed. This is true of such plants as the strawberry,

Irish potato, sugar-cane, Bermuda grass except under favorable conditions, and many strains of creeping bent.

Almost invariably when one seeds red fescue he gets a lot of small circular tufts with numerous bare places among them, giving a foot-hold for weeds or a depression for a ball to roll into for a bad lie. It is sometimes pathetic to watch the efforts of some greenkeepers who learned their trade in the Old Country who are trying to produce matted turf of red fescue with the seed they have to work with in this country.

There is a peculiarity in the habit of growth of the non-creeping red fescue which renders it practically useless for putting green turf. The stems of the individual plants grow upright for a half to three fourths of an inch from the crown in the surface of the soil before the green leaves appear. In cutting down to the length demanded by golfers all of the green leaves are removed and a grass can not survive very long which does not have green leaves to manufacture the material needed for new growth. Often a perfect stand of seedling fescue vanishes after it has been cut a few times.

The only really good fescue putting greens which I have ever seen are on some of the courses around Seattle, Washington. Whether the soil there is especially adapted to the growing of fescue or the clubs were fortunate in obtaining extra good seed I am unable to say. On all of the other fescue greens which I have seen, the greenkeepers were constantly renewing the stand by reseeding. Most of the so-called fescue greens in New England are velvet bent.

Red fescue is often used in fairway mixtures but I have never been able to see any great advantage it has for that purpose. Unless some other turf forming grass like Kentucky bluegrass is sown with it to fill in the vacant places the turf is unsatisfactory from the player's point of view. If one goes to the trouble to produce a good turf of bluegrass, what good is the fescue?

Red Fescue For Rough

There are places for red fescue on a golf course which
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Golf Grasses

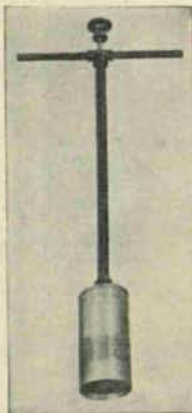
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nothing else seems to be able to fill quite so well, and that is for rough, on the slopes of bunkers and sides of greens. The faults enumerated above makes this grass an ideal rough. It will grow on poor soil. Its dwarf habit of growth makes it economical to maintain. There is not enough to hide balls. In the Northern States it will last for many years when not cut short. Sheep's fescue, a coarser grass with a distinctly bluish cast in color, has often been recommended for this purpose. This was due largely to the fact that red fescue seed was formerly much higher in price. But since greenkeepers have generally come to the conclusion that red fescue is of little value for putting greens and much less is used than was the case a few years ago the price of the two sorts has been about the same, with red fescue sometimes selling for less than the sheep's.

Meadow Fescue

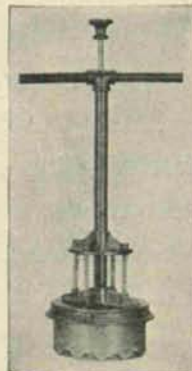
Some unscrupulous dealers have highly recommended and sold meadow fescue for fine turf purposes. One man in the West got into conflict a few years ago with the Postal authorities for selling seed of this grass under a high-sounding name. Meadow fescue is a coarse farm grass, resembling very much the rye-grasses. It has no special value for fine turf.

There are a number of other fescues sometimes listed in seedmen's catalogues such as fine-leaved fescue and hard fescue. The fine-leaved fescue usually turns out to be the same as red fescue and the hard fescue is another name for sheep's fescue.



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