

New Tools for Overseeding Success

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September is the month when golf course superintendents begin putting the final touches on their plans for fall overseeding. By the first week of the month, truck and trailer loads of seed start to arrive. Extra equipment is being rented and crews are put on notice regarding overtime in the coming weeks. In the South, everyone knows that the outcome of overseeding will set the tone of either success or failure for the winter golfing season and possibly beyond.

Changes in the golf business during the past several years have required superintendents to adjust their methods to meet new demands. Television has caused standards to rise so rapidly that what was considered "in good shape" ten years ago would hardly pass muster today. Because October, the prime month for overseeding, is also one of the most beautiful and popular for golfers, superintendents are under pressure to complete overseeding earlier every fall.

New levels of expectations for higher quality, consistency, and course availability have forced superintendents to instigate changes in overseeding practices. They began to search for ways to get better fall establishment of ryegrass and rough bluegrass without heavy competition in the fall from the bermuda.

First came Diquat herbicide, a desiccant that dries out the bermuda and temporarily stops its growth without permanent harm. What took weeks of cutting back on irrigation before, now takes one day with the herbicide. It can be sprayed as soon as two to three days prior to seed bed preparation without serious side effects.

Flushing out Diquat residue before seeding is a wise move. However, the herbicide might not last long enough to hold off the bermuda in the event of an autumn warm spell.

A newer approach is to use growth regulators that offer longer lasting suppression of the bermuda. Primo is replacing or augmenting Diquat on many courses as an aide to overseeding. It retards bermuda's foliar growth without drying it out and without retarding root growth.

In fact, the material's mode of action forces carbohydrates into the root system. The plant takes on dwarf characteristics, such as slower growth, finer blades and darker color. The result is finer, lower, greener and less competitive bermuda. Consequently, the overseeded turf has a better chance to germinate and become established. Primo, like Diquat, can be applied very close to renovation time.

The two chemicals make an effective pair when used together. Superintendents apply Primo first, because the bermuda must be growing actively for the growth retardant to work. A day or two later, the bermuda is sprayed with Diquat. It reduces the volume and weight of clippings, and makes it easier to break into the dense bermuda thatch. Less competition from the bermuda increases the survival rate of the overseeded turfgrass during establishment. Next spring when it's time for the bermuda to take over again, and the winter golf season extends further and further into the year, the bermuda rebounds vigorously to reclaim its position as the summer turf of choice.

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