

Control of bluegrass in bentgrass fairways & efficiency of foliar feedings

Editors' note: Send your turfgrass questions to our Management Forum panel for quick response. See page 12 for details.

Q *Is there a selective way to remove bluegrass from a bentgrass fairway? We are mowing the fairway at 5/8-inch and the collars of greens even lower. But, the bluegrass still is out competing the bent, even at the low height. What can be done?*

Dr. Richard Hull at the University of Rhode Island's Department of Plant Science says that the first question that needs to be answered is which bluegrass species is invading the bentgrass fairways? If it is a perennial form of *Poa annua* (*Poa annua* var. *reptans*), then there is no surprise that it can tolerate close mowing. However, it could be rough bluegrass (*Poa trivialis*), especially if the fairways are somewhat shaded.

If the culprit is *Poa annua*, there are few, if any, herbicides that will selectively remove it from bentgrass without damaging the bent. However, some plant growth regulators (PGR) have been found to discourage *Poa annua* in bent, but this requires a prolonged effort.

If rough bluegrass is present, it can readily be identified by its stoloniferous growth habit, lack of rhizomes and a 2-6 mm pointed ligule. Its control will also present a problem but it is less likely to be the grass in question.

The question sort of suggests that the invading grass is Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*). If it is Kentucky bluegrass, it is undoubtedly a prostrate type that can tolerate close mowing. Again, there is no effective herbicide that will selectively remove Kentucky bluegrass from bent.

Most grass herbicides are more likely to be toxic to bentgrass than to Kentucky bluegrass. Even PGRs are less likely to be effective in preferentially weakening this bluegrass. In short, this problem has no clear solution. I would suggest that the superin-

tendent check the mowing height to be sure the cut is 5/8-inch. If it is, try lowering it a bit and see if the bluegrass is discouraged. A lower cutting height should not seriously weaken the bentgrass. The cutting height might be gradually lowered until at some point the bluegrass should give up and let the bentgrass take over.

"Most grass herbicides are more likely to be toxic to bentgrass than to Kentucky bluegrass." — R. Hull

Dr. Joseph Neal at North Carolina State University replies: First, an accurate ID is always helpful in developing a weed management plan; although in cooler regions of the country, I have seen Kentucky bluegrass tolerating 1/2-inch mowing and other bluegrasses that tolerate close mowing even better than Kentucky bluegrass.

Selectively removing one perennial turfgrass from another is always a challenge. I suggest two approaches that may work.

- **Option #1:** If the bluegrass grows a little taller than the bentgrass at any time of year you could skip one mowing then wipe the taller grass with Roundup. We have used this technique in the past to remove weedy grasses from bluegrass variety trials.
- **Option #2:** Spot renovate in early fall. Spray the bluegrass patches with glyphosate and reseed areas with bentgrass.

"Selectively removing one perennial turfgrass from another is always a challenge." — J. Neal