

USGA

Evaluating New Grasses For Use On Putting Greens - A Practical Approach

by: Pat Gross, Western Region Agronomist, USGA Green Section

How do you go about selecting the best possible turfgrass variety for use on your putting greens? Read the National Turfgrass Evaluation Program (NTEP) reports? Read the sales literature? Visit your local university and take a look at their turf plots? Talk to the superintendent next door and see what he's using? Put the new grasses on your nursery and see which one is best? Maybe you are doing all of the above. With all of the new creeping bentgrasses and hybrid bermudagrasses, it is sometimes difficult to muddle through all the information and determine which variety is best for your course.

It is always good to start by gathering as much scientific information as possible and consider grasses that have been tested for a minimum of three years. Historically, most superintendents have relied on the NTEP trials as a starting point. Unfortunately, NTEP data for putting greens has not been highly regarded by superintendents mainly because the tests are not usually conducted

close to their area and under similar climate conditions. University field plots, and particularly the NTEP plots, also fail to take an important factor into consideration — traffic. A new program is not underway to evaluate cultivar performance under real world conditions. The GCSAA, NTEP, and USGA have come up with a project to build fifteen practice greens in difference climatic regions throughout the United States that will contain relicated plots of twenty different creeping bentgrass varieties. Eventually, the new hybrid bermudagrass will also be evaluated. The practice greens will be maintained just like the other greens on the golf course and will be subjected to normal traffic and wear. This will provide better data that can be used as a guideline to make an informed decision.

While this program may not answer all the questions of how a particular grass will perform at your golf course, it will provide more useful information under real world conditions. It is still best to plant the top

four or five varieties in your putting green nursery to gain first hand experience on how these grasses will respond to your management practices and growing conditions.

Breeding efforts over the past ten years have produced new creeping bentgrass cultivars with finer texture, improved density, lower water use rate, better stress tolerance, and many other positive attributes. With so many more choices available, it seems we are getting closer to having specialized grasses that fulfill specific needs in various areas of the country. While all of these varieties look great in the test plots, it is difficult to predict how they will perform at your particular golf course, especially under traffic conditions. It is hoped that this new turfgrass evaluation program will answer some of these questions and provide additional information on specific management practices for different regions of the country. ♦

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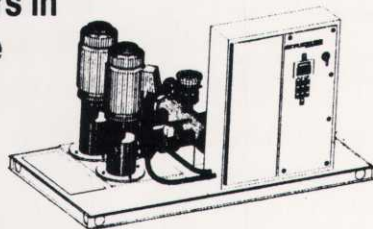


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