



The Ultradwarf Investment Response

By Chris Hartwiger and Patrick O'Brien, agronomists, Southeast Region

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As authors of the SE region updates, we often wonder if anyone actually reads our printed words. After our January 15th column called "The Ultradwarf Investment" we received an interesting response/question. We thought it would be useful to print both the question and our response.

Dear Patrick,

*I have seen you shift from Tifdwarf/ Penncross to Crenshaw and the improved bents. Now a 180 degree shift to the ultradwarfs. What happens when we have a cold winter? I mean a **really** cold winter because we will have one again. Will you do another 180? I think you should keep in mind that we live in the transition zone and that neither grass is best adapted here. Some years one will outperform the other and vice versa. There really is no good or best choice.*

Our reply:

Dear Reader,

Thanks for taking the time to read our article. We are responding because you are misinterpreting our position.

1.) The purpose of the article was to discuss the question of how much money, if any, can be saved by switching from bentgrass to an ultradwarf. The question was sent in by a reader.

2.) When new turfgrasses are introduced that offer improvements in survival and playability, the ultimate winner is the golfer. Our goal is to recommend the best turfgrass variety available. Penncross was better than Tifdwarf. Crenshaw was better than Penncross. And today, the ultradwarf varieties offer an improvement for courses that can not handle bentgrass in the summer or courses seeking to provide championship firmness and speeds in the summer. The great news for the courses that have converted is that they are exceedingly happy with the ultradwarf surface. We do view it as a plus that courses are succeeding with a turfgrass that is not as difficult to keep alive, can handle all the summer traffic you want, and can require fewer chemical inputs.

3.) The flight to ultradwarfs is not USGA driven, it is market driven. Morris Brown of Champion Turf Farms brought to market an excellent grass and revolutionized the way bermudagrass greens are planted or converted from bentgrass. The market has accepted their product and it's worked well for almost ten years now. Interestingly, we just don't see golf courses taking out bermudagrass and planting bentgrass.

4.) We are well aware of our location in the transition zone. Let's not forget that every major city from Raleigh west to Memphis (with the exception of the mountains) and south had bermudagrass putting greens until the mid to late 70's. The lone holdover that didn't go totally to bentgrass is Memphis. We know there will be another cold winter sometime and we advise courses in the transition zone to buy insurance in the form of turf covers. One of our Green Section Committee, Rod Lingle of Memphis CC, has never lost a green due to winterkill in more than 25 years in Memphis. We are not worried about courses in the northern part of the transition zone. We worry about courses in Atlanta, Birmingham, etc. that thinks it won't get cold again. If they have spoken with us, they have been advised.

Thanks again for speaking up. We hear you and appreciate your feedback. And in case you are wondering, we would definitely favor a yet-to-be-developed variety that resists nematodes, doesn't die in the summer, grows in the shade, doesn't get disease, and stays green all year. Until then, we will keep trying to help golf courses do the best they can under their circumstances.

There is no doubt that the ultradwarf bermudagrasses are a hot topic in our region. As we are out on the frontlines each season, we will try to keep you updated on the latest trends, research, and techniques superintendents are using to produce better playing conditions for golfers. For more information, keep

reading our columns and contact either of us to set up a Turfgrass Advisory Visit where these topics and more can be discussed in detail at your golf course.

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