

VIEWPOINT

Bruce F. Shank, Editor

You might think that someone who gets excited about grass seed must be strange. But if you visit the research facilities of seed companies across the United States and Europe, you would feel interested too.

In the past two months I've had the pleasure of visiting seed companies from New Jersey to Post Falls, Idaho. And much to my surprise, I'm excited about varieties ready to enter the market in the next two years.

The greatest swell of research interest is for reclamation. Northrup King, Jacklin, Lofts, International and Stanford all have products ready to serve this blossoming field. They also are studying new varieties tolerant of alkaline and acid soils for western needs.

And before you get used to bluegrasses just released, improved ryegrasses and fine fescues will be available which either add significantly to mixes or stand on their own.

You should visit a seed research farm and talk to a research director. They somehow manage to memorize what grass is located in every three by five foot block of a five-acre field. Then you go to their offices and see stacks of paper bags filled with seed. Each bag has a long number on it and someone knows what each number stands for. In fact, by looking at a few seeds that researchers can tell you the genus.

It used to be that many of the grasses were discovered on a golf course or park where they developed through natural selection. Today, most of the grasses are developed through cloning at research farms. Not only must the grass be disease resistant, but it will never make it to market unless it also produces abundant seed.

Once the new variety is developed, years of testing in many locations across the country are needed before commercial introduction. There are currently a number of varieties in this phase right now. Within the next two or three years there will be a number of new names in turf seed, including a new Merion.

We need to improve our methods of informing the public about new, improved turfgrass varieties. Urban extension agents and retail nurserymen must be kept abreast of turfgrass research. Buyers for discount stores need to know the facts of fine turf seed.

It is your responsibility to advise customers of improved varieties. It is also your responsibility to ask sod producers to grow the new varieties. As a result, customers will receive the best turf available and you will be respected for your up-to-date knowledge of your field.

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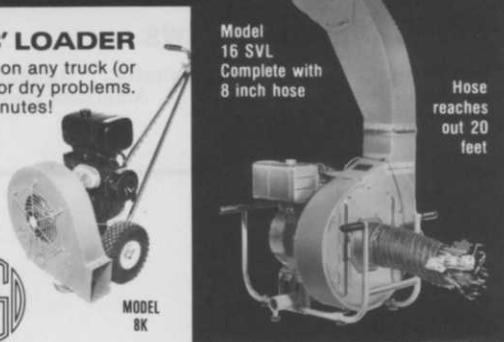
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