

PROSCAPE

By Michael Hurdzan, Ph.D., golf course designer and consultant

Q: What is the average "life span" of the new turf type perennial ryegrasses? No one states this in their advertising. G.E., Mahwah, NJ

A: I do not believe that there is an "average life span" for these grasses as their longevity is a function of where they are planted, how they are used, and the maintenance that they receive. To be specific, if about 15% turf-type perennial rye is blended with a bluegrass mix in the Midwest, and the turf is given about 3 pounds of N per year, watered occasionally and is mowed about 1½" high, the ryegrass will not only persist indefinitely but it may begin to dominate the mix. This domination by the ryegrasses may be the result of more vigorous growth during colder temperatures when bluegrasses may be dormant, tillering of the ryegrasses into open areas left by dead or dying bluegrasses, and/or the aggressive incursion of ryegrass aided by their tendency to grow faster than other turf varieties and cause shading. Because the ryegrasses are so competitive, it is usually recommended that not more than 20% of mix be turf-type ryegrass and some believe that it should be only 5% of the seed mix.

Q: I have read Proscap for the past one and a half years and I have wondered what value is a Consultant. It seems more often than not whenever a Consultant is called in someone loses their job. Doesn't this bother you or how do you avoid the situation? J.P., Minneapolis, MN

A: First, a Consultant is rarely ever called unless there is a problem that the resident staff has not been able to solve with in-house skills and information. So, when a Consultant is called it is with the hope that he will provide that information or skill that will correct the problem.

Many times the problem is so acute there is no easy solution and nothing can be done but start over. When this happens the Consultant's worth may be questioned for we all want easy solutions. However, it is the professional responsibility of the Consultant to be as candid as possible with all parties involved about situations that he is 100% confident about. If he is uncertain about a particular problem then he should say so and make sure any remarks are taken as only speculation.

It indeed bothers everyone if a man loses his position over a Consultant's report; but most often the report is simply used as an excuse to terminate an employee and is not the real reason.

Q: Are there any industry averages breaking out income and expenses within the landscape design and landscape contracting business? Robert Morris Associates publishes a composite statement for horticultural services which lumps the two together and is not very specific with regard to income percentages.

A: To my knowledge there is no such source book and with the instability of the economy and fluctuating costs of labor and materials I do not believe any will be forthcoming.

As a general rule, most practitioners figure materials at cost plus handling and then add a profit of 15-35% depending on how competitive the bids must be. Then labor is figured as per number of man hours required to complete the job multiplied by the average wage rate, then they add in 25-30% for benefits and administration plus another percentage of 15-20% for profit. As an example if the average wage that must be paid is:

\$ 10.00/hour for laborer
3.00/hour for administration
2.00/for profit

\$15.00/hour for each manhour on the job

Q: With the possibility of another impending gas shortage, would you publish any energy saving ideas that may have been shared with your magazine when we had the Arab oil embargo of a few years ago? Or ask your readers to submit any suggestions they may have used. Y.C., Westminster, CO

A: An excellent suggestion. Weeds Trees and Turf would be pleased to print and credit any ideas that would help conserve our limited energy resources.

Q: What is the best and most inexpensive method to break up clay soil (hard) over which sod has been placed? After five years we are still having difficulty getting the grass roots to penetrate this clay. Northern Virginia, VA

A: I would suggest that you review the Proscap column from the February 1979 issue of WTT. The described procedures are about as inexpensive as possible and yet achieve some notable results.

Q: What is the best and cheapest ryegrass that will grow in Clay without watering and the least mowings? AA Inc., Angola, NY

A: I assume you mean turf-type ryegrass. All ryegrasses seem to perform well in clay that has been properly prepared for seeding. Of course, the terms best and cheapest contradict. Much research is taking place lately comparing ryegrasses with the result of newer improved varieties. Cheapest ryegrass is the older Linn in most cases. Manhattan will be near the top of the cost list. Derby is a moderately priced improved ryegrass. There are many others of good quality you should consider.

Although height is one growth characteristic improved lately with lower growing cultivars, growth regulators can reduce the number of mowings in low wear areas where vigorous growth is not needed to fill in damaged spots.

You'll pay more for lower growing, clean cutting, and deeper green types of ryegrass. But you may save in other ways.