

'94 turfseed crops: ADEQUATE

■ Turfseed end users can smile at the 1994 crop. Barring unusual mid-summer rains in Oregon, adequate crops of almost all species and varieties are forecast.

Jerry Pepin of Pickseed West, Tangent, Ore., says, "We're expecting a pretty average perennial ryegrass crop and a slightly below average tall fescue crop yieldwise."

This year, more acreage was planted in perennial ryegrass than tall fescue, in about a 10-to-6 ratio. This is in line with demand and usage, he explains, and corrects, somewhat, over-production of fescues for several years.

"It's not going to be a barnbuster, but

there will be adequate supply," says Eric Nelson of Medalist America. There may be shortages in some varieties, however, he believes. "It's probably a good idea to start booking seed right now if you want it delivered. You may find out that the varieties you want are no longer available."

Advises Tom Stanley, marketing director at Turf-Seed Inc., Hubbard, Ore., "If I were an end user and planning to buy particular varieties I would talk to my seed supplier and see about getting locked in for this fall or for the spring of '95."

"You won't be able to go into the store and buy whatever you want."

Don Floyd, Pickseed West, Corvallis, Ore., predicts more rust tolerance in the next generation of turfgrass.

Even so, weather in the Pacific Northwest—specifically the Willamette Valley and the Columbia River basin, where tens of thousands of turfseed acres are concentrated—has been favorable to production this past year. The turfseed season basically goes from July to July.

"All in all, the crop looks generally favorable," reports Craig Edminster of International Seed, Halsey, Ore.

"We're really in good shape. So far, the weather has been good," adds Mike Robinson of Seed Research

It's probably a good idea to start shopping for the seed you want right now, experts claim.

of Oregon, Inc., Corvallis. About the only disappointment, he says, is that tall fescues didn't put on as many seedheads as anticipated.

Robinson reports some carryover of seed from the previous year although proprietary varieties moved briskly this spring and summer, particularly Providence bentgrass and chewings fescue. He says he's hoping for continued favorable weather so the crop can be swathed, combined, conditioned, tested and shipped as soon as possible.

In the Willamette Valley, fescues grown around the Silverton Hills are harvested first, then by July's end the ryegrasses, and finally bentgrasses in early August. This year, the harvest timing appears to be near normal, an improvement of two to three weeks earlier than last year, notes Dennis Lundeen of Great Western Seed.

"We've been dry here in the valley," says Lundeen. "That's had some effect. But bluegrass, bentgrass and fine fescue crops look, generally, good."

"Ryegrasses might be tight, though, and there may be some *Poa annua* contamination because of fields not being burned and the winter weather. However, most of the poa will be cleaned out by the time the seed gets to market."

In Kentucky bluegrass production country in eastern Oregon and Idaho, Glenn Jacklin of the Jacklin Seed Co., reports common Kentucky bluegrass swathing began in late June. That crop is a bit below average, while the proprietary crop looks good. Supplies of both should be adequate, he believes.

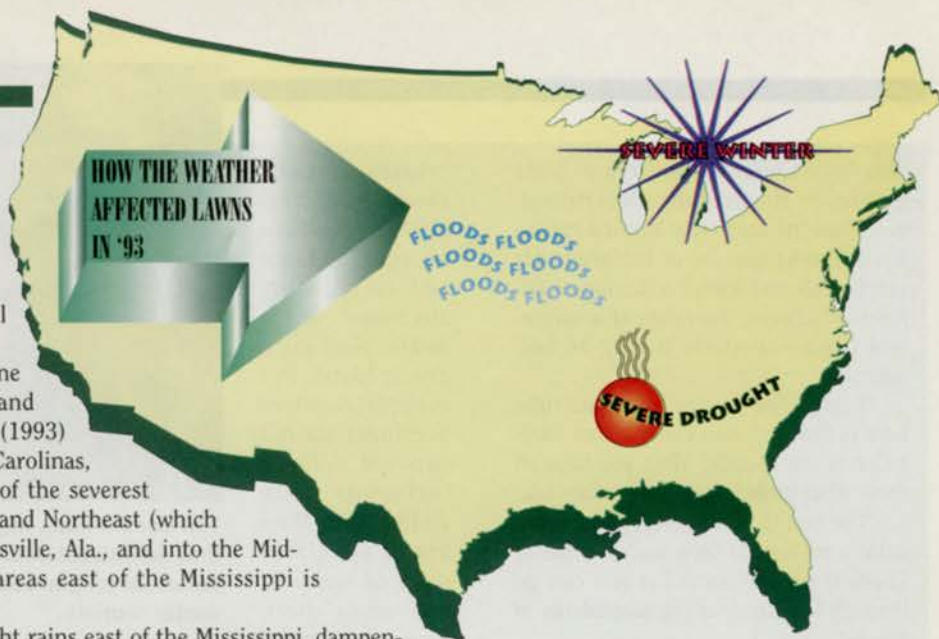
From the marketing end, Gayle Jacklin reports the price for perennial ryegrass should remain strong, tall fescue flat but steady, and creeping bentgrass about the same with limited availability and higher prices for the experimentals.



Common Kentucky bluegrass is trading in the 60-70 cent range, about half of what it traded for in the spring of 1993. A large supply of low-priced creeping red fescue from Canada last year reduced the amount of common Kentucky sold in retail mixtures, she reports.

Weather, as it always does, will determine demand for turfseed again this season, and demand could be strong. This past year (1993) saw a severe drought in Georgia and the Carolinas, floods in the upper Mississippi, and one of the severest winters ever recorded in the Great Lakes and Northeast (which killed bermudagrass as far south as Huntsville, Ala., and into the Mid-Atlantic states). Turf damage in many areas east of the Mississippi is almost epidemic.

A cool 1994 spring was followed by light rains east of the Mississippi, dampening seed sales somewhat and suggesting that turf renovations should be full bore early this fall.



—Ron Hall



Dr. Mike Richardson, right, confers with Mike Herod, Herod Seed, Richardson is the new research director at Turf Merchants Inc., Aurora, Ore.



Rick Williams, operations manager, says Jacklin Seed, Post Falls, Idaho, averages about 6,000 experimental varieties planted each year.

■ Lynn Ray says winter kill decimated Tifway 419 bermudagrass fairways in Nashville, Tenn. this past winter. Ray, director of golf maintenance at Nashboro Village, says this happens about once every five years there.

Ray's seen enough turfgrass maps to know that Nashville is in

Ray knows that these maps can't tell the whole story, however. One of the two golf courses he oversees, the one just north of Nashville, carried a snow cover through the bitter cold. It suffered just 10 percent winter kill. Fairways on the exposed course sustained 60 percent damage.

Stretching turfgrass adaptability



the so-called "transition zone." This imaginary 200-mile-wide strip is bordered, roughly, on the north by the Mason-Dixon line and extends in an arc west to the Mississippi, and several hundred miles beyond. It's too hot and humid in July and August for cool-season grasses here, not without an unacceptable chemical budget anyway.

Because his courses were also seeded with perennial ryegrass, golfers continued to enjoy them through the early part of the summer. When the summer is at its hottest, and the number of rounds traditionally declines, Ray says the Nashville course will be sprigged again with a combination of 419 and Quickstand.

"Best guesses," that's

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how Tom Cook, at the Oregon State University Horticulture Department, describes the maps that outline ranges for different species of turfgrass. He emphasizes that there's a significant difference between the range of a species and the areas where it may be *best* adapted.

"I can define four or five zones right here in Oregon," says Cook. "Grass adaptation is site specific. Then you have all these other variables that you manipulate.

"The reality is that every state, every little area has its own micro-climate. There is no five-point list you can go through to determine the adaptability of grasses."

Turfgrass breeders probably know this better than anybody. Their livelihood, in fact, focuses on improving turfgrass adaptability. The strides they make are small and, usually, incremental but they're vital nevertheless, like in the case of bermudagrass.

Says Ray, "just a few degrees difference in hardiness would make a big difference for us."

Susan Samudio, a plant breeder for Jacklin Seed, says, "initially I screen

crosses and (bermudagrass) plant introductions for cold tolerance and turf quality attributes" at the Jacklin plant nursery in Idaho. For example, SunDevil bermudagrass has survived in Idaho turf plots since 1989. Only then are selections screened again. So far, she's been focusing on seeded cold-tolerant varieties like the new Jackpot which scored well in the 1992 trials in Tennessee.

Actually, work has been focused on improving the cold-tolerance of bermudagrass since Dr. Felix Juska's efforts for the USDA in the 1950s, and continuing with Dr. Ray Keene's efforts at the Kansas Agricultural Experiment Site leading to the release of Midiron and Midway more than 25 years ago.

Oklahoma State University's Dr.



Turf-Seed's Russ Hayworth tells wagonload of guests that southwest courses seeding with higher rates of perennial ryegrasses to make courses greener for winter tourists.

Charles Taliaferro and Dr. Ken Diesburg at Southern Illinois University have now mounted ambitious programs to develop bermudagrasses with even finer textures and increased cold tolerance.

While researchers look for ways to stretch the boundaries of turfgrass adaptation, Cook's advice to the purchasers of turfseed is uncommonly simple.

"I look to see what's growing best in an area," he says. "Local knowledge helps a lot."

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