



Overseeding: MAKE OR BREAK TIME

Golfers's demands for denser turf drive Richard Sall to continually improve his overseeding program at Tamarisk CC near Palm Springs

By RON HALL/
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Golfers following the sun to California's Coachella Valley each winter expect to play on green turf. But Bermudagrass fairways go dormant brown each fall.

One of Richard Sall's responsibilities as superintendent at Tamarisk Country Club, Rancho Mirage, is to provide members and guests with verdant green playing conditions.

He does this, of course, by overseeding ryegrass into his Bermudagrass each fall.

This is a common practice on courses throughout the Sun-belt. But Sall, in his 12 years at Rancho Mirage, has developed some unique wrinkles in his



The number 13 green at Tamarisk shown before overseeding (inset) and after the project was completed.

overseeding program that other superintendents are starting to pick up on.

How important is overseeding on a course like Tamarisk?

"These are the days that can make or break my year," says Sall. For this reason, since 1992 he's been carefully graphing the high and low temperatures for the first 20 days of October.

"The night temperature has the greatest effect on bermudagrass growth," he explains.

"When the temperature drops below 60° F. growth slows dramatically. That usually occurs

in mid October in the Coachella Valley." Even with daytime temperatures nearing 90° F., it's the evening temperatures that slow and, finally, stop the growth of Bermudagrass, between October 12-16 in recent years. This has been somewhat later than he used to overseed; it's worked better.

"By moving back the seeding date by one week, competition from Bermudagrass is reduced, less water is required to keep the seed bed moist and there's less risk of disease to germinating seedlings," says Sall.

Much of what Sall does is routine. He reduces irrigation prior to renovating to dry out the bermuda and make it easier to scalp. Sall believes it's better to water to keep the turf from drying out, and reduce water gradually.

Another option : a desiccant like diquat (Reward) to reduce Bermuda competition. After some experimenting on several trial plots he now uses one quart per acre combined with one pint of spreader-sticker (a.k.a. spray adjuvant) applied to dry turf.

"It dries out the Bermuda and makes it easier to renovate," says Sall. "It cuts down on the amount of debris."

It's important to renovate thoroughly all areas that are sprayed, Sall advises. Diquat can affect seedlings, otherwise.

Renovation, starting with scalping the Bermuda, is difficult even for powerful diesel mowers. "This has to shorten the life of a very expensive machine," says Sall. Instead, he's been using what he half-jokingly refers to as "the perfect renovating machine", a specially prepared flail mower (see sidebar).

Here, with some adjustments from season to season, is Sall's overseeding process:

► Let the fairway grow to one inch. It takes two to three weeks in Palm Springs to get from $\frac{7}{16}$ ths (summer height) to one inch.

► Spray either Primo growth regulator or diquat, or do nothing, based on the weather and when you want to seed.

► Set height on the flail mower. Sall sets it at $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch.

► Find the right speed for the flail. Don't go too fast. Make one pass over fairways. Sweep up debris and haul it away. Sall composts 25 percent of the clippings. Nothing is better to mix with wet ryegrass than dry Bermuda thatch. (The ryegrass dries and doesn't have an odor when mowing.)

► There will be a little green Bermudagrass left. Take the shields off the triplex mowers and go over the fairways the day before seeding. Set the mowers at $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch using grooved rollers, and make one pass on all fairways. It takes two operators about 30-40 minutes per fairway.

► Before seeding, pre-water the areas that have been renovated because the ground is so dry now. Seed will remain in place and will not move with water flow.



Before (above) and after the renovation. Diquat reduces Bermuda-grass competition, says Richard Sall.



A perfect renovation will show very little bermudagrass remaining.

► Calibrate the amount of ryegrass you'll use by marking off a one-inch square on a piece of paper and coating it with a glue stick. Lay it on the fairway and drive over it with a seeder. Thirty-eight seeds in the one-inch square represents a seeding rate of 800 lbs. of seed per acre. A rate 400 lbs. to the acre, of course, means 18-19 seeds. (Remember wall-to-wall cart paths represent about 3 acres of concrete.)

► Irrigate. Sall uses a drum of wetting agent in his irrigation.

► After the seed germinates, fertilize it. Sall will inject 8-8-8

fertilizer, the maximum they can put in solution.

"I find the 8-8-8 helps the new rye seedlings get established because it's more like a foliar spray," says Sall, "and it decreases competition from the bermuda."

Regardless of the different techniques that superintendents use to overseed their courses, the results are almost always better when the decision on when to seed is made by the superintendent on the course, rather than in a boardroom, believes Sall. □

A 'renovating' machine

Mike Kocour, at nearby The Springs Club in Palm Springs, made a "renovating machine" by having a 5-inch-diameter roller fabricated and mounted to the front of a flail mower. By adding the roller and disconnecting the top bar of the 3-point hitch, the unit is able to float over the top of the ground. You can set the height of cut without scalping the high spots, says Sall.

Since using that first 88-inch unit behind a 90-hp tractor at Tamarisk, Superintendent Richard Sall has had a 60-inch unit made for his course. It has better articulation and can be pulled with a smaller tractor.