



Lawn care overseeding: room for growth

Overseeding for commercial and residential clients is regional and offers additional \$\$\$ opportunity

By RON HALL/
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Overseeding of commercial and residential properties is a service with regional customer acceptance. Lawn and landscape companies often offer this service, but its reception by property owners varies widely, even in areas where overseeding is commonplace on golf courses and athletic fields.

Winter overseeding of bermudagrass is so common it's almost taken for granted in desert resort markets like Palm Springs, CA. Even the median strips dividing the boulevards in these communities get fresh ryegrass seed each September or early October, not to mention resorts, commercial properties, multifamily complexes and, even, home lawns.

"People who come down from the north to play golf and stay at the resorts in these communities expect to see green grass," says Ibson Dow with the Las Vegas Fertilizer Company.

Overseeding is done in markets like Phoenix and Tucson, AZ, but not to the same extent. "A lot of people here overseed, particularly from a commercial standpoint," says Kevin Killmer of The Groundskeeper, headquartered in Tucson. "Maybe 95% of our commercial customers do overseed, and it's stayed pretty constant with the commercial properties. It would probably be less

in the residential market."

But in other southern or southwestern markets, the practice of overseeding commercial, multifamily and residential properties isn't widespread. Not yet anyway. This suggests a potentially profitable add-on service that lawn/landscape companies might want to develop and market more heavily.

Gary LaScalea, GroGreen, Plano, TX, says that overseeding on commercial and residential properties "is all over the board" in the Dallas market. "We do some and contract some out, and some of our customers do it themselves and we help them," he says.

"Every year you see a little bit more," he adds, particularly on upscale retail and commercial properties. "Because we're not a mowing company, we don't actively market overseeding, but if a customer asks for it, we'll do it."

New definition needed?

Generally, most of us think of overseeding as putting down perennial ryegrass (less commonly annual rye) in early fall to provide color and protection to a warm-season turf, usually bermudagrass, which either



Kevin Killmer

thins or goes dormant and off-color as winter approaches. Is this definition too narrow for commercial and residential turf service markets, particularly away from the traditional bermudagrass markets?

For example, in some transition-zone markets, lawn/landscape professionals routinely "overseed" turf-type tall fescue seed into tall fescue lawns each fall.

Fescue over fescue

Pete Giaque, an agronomist with AgriBio Tech, says that drought and disease take their toll on tall fescue properties in and around Atlanta each summer. Fresh fescue seed must be applied to fill in these bare areas.

"It's pretty much mandatory after a rough summer when there's been a lot of brown patch damage," says Giaque. "It's common to come in with three or four pounds per 1,000 (sq. ft.) and reseed into an existing stand of tall fescue."

Dick Bare, owner/operator of Arbor-Nomics, Norcross, GA, says that his company doesn't promote overseeding of tall fescue but, nevertheless, does a substantial amount, generally in conjunction with fall aerification. "We do it as a service because

we have to," he says. The typical charge to the property owner is about \$40 per 1,000 sq. ft., and sometimes that doesn't seem like enough.

"A lot of times here in September it stays hot, it doesn't rain and the ground's as hard as a brick," Bare explains. "If the property owner doesn't water the turf to prepare it for aerification, it's hardly worth all the effort." Bare says that if he can get a customer to make a down payment on the work, "then they'll go out and get the lawn prepared."

What the customer wants

Even so, many experienced lawn care professionals see only limited potential in offering overseeding.

Scott Williams, Lawn Master Inc., Pensacola, FL, says he can almost count the overseeding jobs his company does each year on one hand, and all of them are commercial properties. Williams says that homeowners in his market welcome when their St. Augustine and centipedegrass lawns slow down each winter. "Most people here mow from March to October, then they look forward to not having to mow," he laughs.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SELECTED GRASSES USED FOR WINTER OVERSEEDING.

Grass Species	Perennial Ryegrass (turf-type)	Annual Ryegrass	Intermediate Ryegrass	Fine Fescue	Roughstalk Bluegrass (Poa trivialis)	Creeping Bentgrass
Green Color	Dark	Light	Intermediate	Light-Dark	Light to intermediate	Intermediate
Texture	Med-Fine (2-4mm)	Coarse (3-5mm)	Coarse-Med. (3-4mm)	V. Fine (1-2mm)	Fine (1-4mm)	V. Fine (1-2mm)
Density	Good	Poor	Fair	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent
Establishment Rate	Fast (3-4 weeks)	Very Fast (2-3 weeks)	Fast (2-4 weeks)	Slow (4-6 weeks)	Slow (4-6 weeks)	Very Slow (6-8 weeks)
Winter Performance	Good-Excellent	Fair-Good	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair
Spring Performance	Good-Excellent	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Fair
Spring Transition	Slow	Medium	Medium	Fast	Fast	Slow
Wear Tolerance	Fair-Excellent	Poor-Fair	Fair-Good	Fair	Poor	Fair
Shade Tolerance	Fair-Good	Fair	Fair	Very Good	Good	Fair
Putting Quality	Fair-Excellent	Poor	Poor-Fair	Good	Excellent	Excellent
Competitiveness with <i>Poa annua</i>	Very	Very	Very	Not Very	Not Very	Not Very
Leaf Fraying	Moderate-minimum	Heavy	Moderate	Minimum	Minimum	Minimum
Disease Resistance	Fair-Good	Poor	Fair	Fair	Poor-Fair	Fair