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**Most companies feel that people  
are their most important resource,  
*but are they the best managed resource?***

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# RESEARCH UPDATE

## Biological control of annual bluegrass

by David L. Roberts, Ph.D., Michigan State University

Traditional weed control in agriculture has been accomplished primarily through the use of chemical herbicides and cultivation. Cultivation practices are of little use for weed control in turfgrass management.

Turf managers, therefore, tend to rely heavily on chemicals for weed control. Chemical herbicides tend to exhibit rather broad spectrum characteristics. Two common examples are 2,4-D and glyphosate (Roundup, Rodeo, etc.). The advantage of such broad spectrum activity is that, for example, with 2,4-D many broadleaf weeds will be affected by one chemical.

In the case of glyphosate, virtually all plants will be affected, making this a very important renovation tool. The disadvantages of broad spectrum chemicals is that non-target plants may be affected. A slight gust of wind can carry that herbicide to some landscaping trees or shrubs, putting an end to the tender loving care that was needed to properly establish these plants at the site.

Another disadvantage is that weeds from the same family or group of plants as the desirable propagated plant cannot be controlled without also harming the desirable plants.

Very few chemicals exist that are species or cultivar specific. It is precisely this characteristic that makes annual bluegrass (*Poa annua*) the most important weed problem on golf courses, lawns and other turfgrass sites.

No chemicals currently exist that can selectively eliminate annual bluegrass from desirable Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*) and creeping bentgrass (*Agrostis palustris*).

The problem is compounded by the fact that, whereas annual bluegrass seeds will normally be controlled by a pre-emergence herbicide, annual bluegrass also occurs as a perennial (*Poa annua* var. *reptans*). Clearly an effective control is needed because the annual bluegrass component of many lawns and golf courses exceeds 50 percent of the grass species.

### Poa attacker

A bacterium that attacks annual bluegrass was discovered in Michigan in 1984 and 1985. The bacterium was first observed selectively suppressing annual bluegrass in golf course and lawn sites. Through various physiological-biochemical, morphological and immunological criteria, the bacterium was characterized as a type of



Preliminary tests showed that when annual bluegrass was inoculated with the bio-control bacterium, plants succumbed within two weeks. Non-inoculated control plants remained healthy and continued to grow.

*Xanthomonas* species.

Preliminary studies in the laboratory demonstrated that the bacterium could effectively suppress and kill annual bluegrass (Photo 1).

Symptoms began to be expressed approximately five days after inoculation of the annual bluegrass with the bacterium. The weed was killed 1½ to 2 weeks after inoculation.

Microscopy studies showed that the bacterium is systemic within the plant. The xylem vessels, which transport fertilizer and water nutrients from the roots to the leaves, was affected by the bacterium.

Further experiments revealed that in mixed stands of grasses, the bacterium will selectively eliminate only the annual bluegrass. In all the experiments, the Kentucky bluegrass and creeping bentgrass continued to grow unharmed (Photo 2).

In fact, concentrations have been



When mixed stands of annual bluegrass, Penncross creeping bentgrass and Adelphi Kentucky bluegrass were inoculated with the bio-control bacterium, only the annual bluegrass was suppressed and eventually killed.

increased 1,000 to 10,000 times without any effects upon the desirable grasses. We have also performed very successful overseeding programs.

If developed into a marketable product, we would anticipate that the bacterium would require four or five applications the first year for a renovation program. Thereafter, we suspect one or two applications per year may be needed to keep annual bluegrass from re-establishment into maintained turfgrass areas.

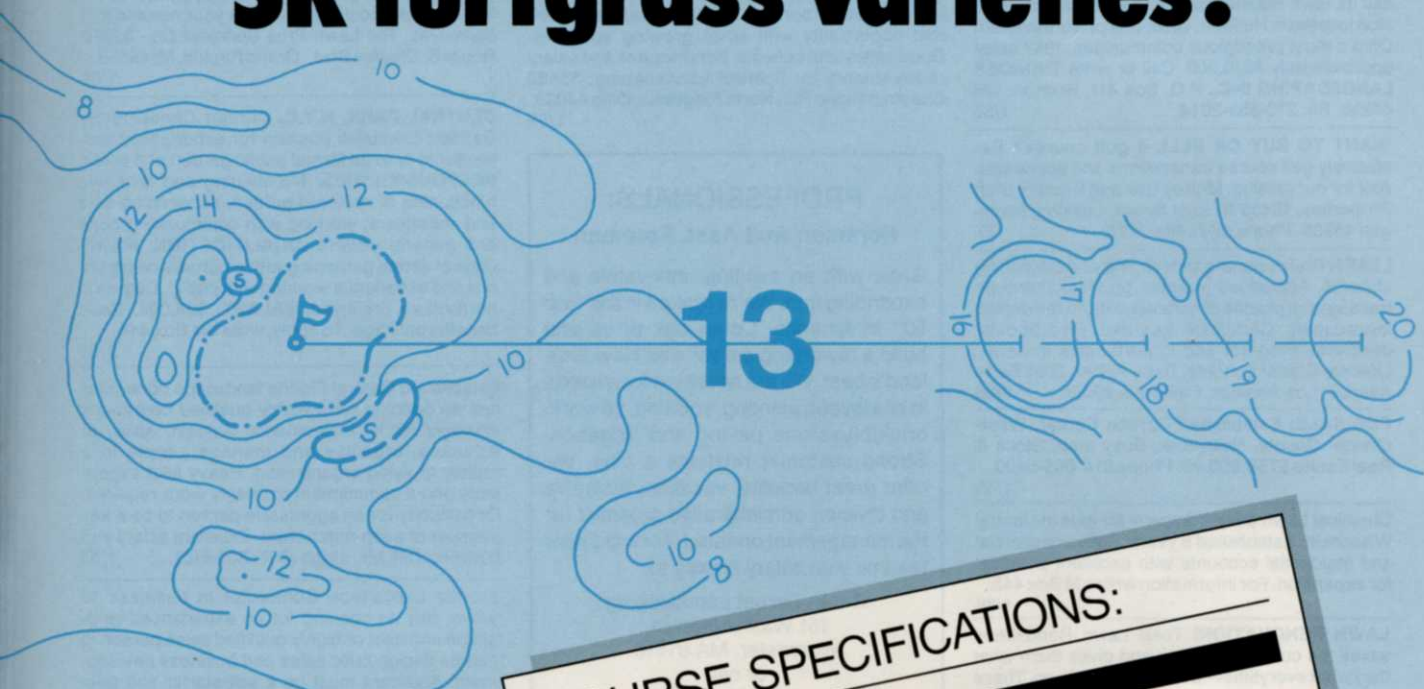
This biological herbicide is unique. It is highly selective, affecting only one species of the grass family. None of the many tested cultivars (or varieties) of Kentucky bluegrass, creeping bentgrass, ryegrass, fescue, rice, wheat, corn, oats, etc. have been affected by the bacterium.

Our observations of natural field situations suggest that the bacterium practically disappears to non-detectable levels several weeks after application. This is an advantage over some chemical pesticides which have been known to linger in the environment for many months.

Field testing has begun. We hope that other strains may be developed that selectively control other weeds. If so, the biological herbicides may provide effective alternatives to chemical pesticides, particularly those that are harmful to people and the environment. **LM**

The author expresses sincere appreciation to cooperators Ron Setweiler and Joseph Vargas, Ph.D.

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or call  
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**San Francisco Bay Area** landscape firm seeks individual with strong horticultural, construction, irrigation, and client relation skills for landscape installation foreman position. Learning and growth opportunities with established company. Competitive compensation and benefits. Letter and/or resume to Landscape Care Company, 4026 Pacheco Boulevard, Martinez, CA 94552. 1/88

**SALES REPRESENTATIVE:** Outstanding opportunity to join and grow with Westchester's fastest growing Tree Care Company. All benefits. Send resume to Ms. Michele Gerards, Sav-A-Tree of Westchester, Inc., P.O. Box 527, Armonk, NY 10504-0527. 2/88

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Established Central Florida landscape contractor has an opening for a highly qualified operations manager for its maintenance division. Ability to schedule, organize and manage people in a rapidly growing organization. Heavy field experience and a commitment to quality work required. Opportunity for an aggressive person to be a key member of a top-notch team. Excellent salary and benefits. Call Mr. Singh (305) 831-8101. 1/88

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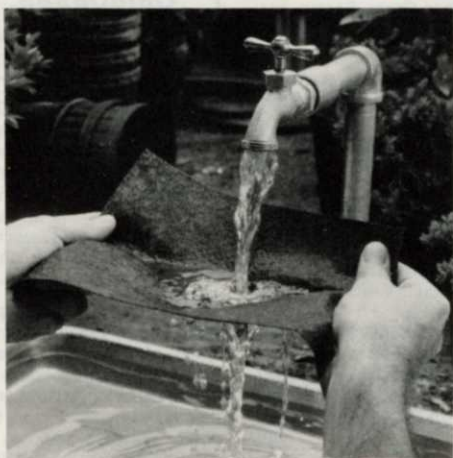
Landscape Architects/Supervisors (project foremen) to join a nationally acclaimed firm looking to expand into its second generation Long Island area supports a high budget landscape industry. Year round employment, company benefits and continuing education available. Experienced and aggressive people send resume to: **GOLDBERG & RODLER, INC.**, 216 East Main Street, Huntington, New York 11743. 1/88

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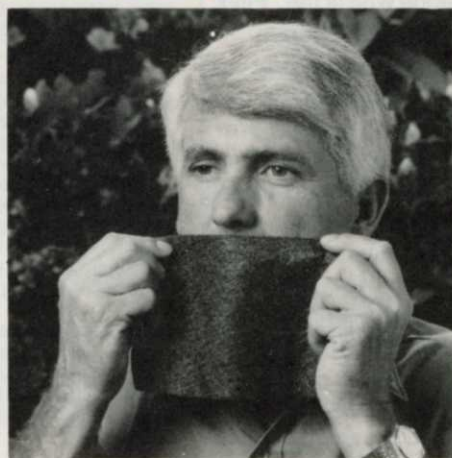
**TECHNICAL MANAGER.** Assistant Director needed to plan & develop plant & tree program with largest landscape management company in Washington, D.C. area. Horticultural background, BS preferred. Application experience and knowledge in program development helpful. Excellent growth opportunity and benefits. Send resume to LM Box 446. 1/88

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Help Wanted—Grounds management supervisor—**AWARD WINNING CORPORATION** is seeking grounds management supervisor. Must be "intelligent" and self-motivated with a minimum of 2 years "hands-on" supervisory experience. Must be able to schedule, train and motivate crews of 9 - 12 in all phases of grounds care. Horticultural degree and pesticide license beneficial. Send resume with salary requirements to A&R Landscaping, 500 Tidewater Drive, Norfolk, VA 23504. 1/88

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**MANAGEMENT:** Ever-Green Lawns Corporation, a division of the multi-national Hawley Group, Ltd. is looking for experienced lawn and tree care professionals. Please respond in writing only to Richard D. Niemann, Corporate Recruiter, Ever-Green Lawns Corp., 1390 Charlestown Industrial Drive, St. Charles, MO 63303. TF

**HELP WANTED** - Person to work on growing tree farm. Must have complete knowledge of growing, digging, and marketing trees. Only those willing to work need apply. Cranmer Grass Farms, Inc., 2501 N. Maize Road, Wichita, KS 67205. 1/88

We are looking for a Landscape Supervisor with experience in leading and working with installation crews. Duties include job scheduling, estimating, reading blueprints, staking jobs, and pruning. We are located in the heart of the Blue Grass State of Kentucky. Family owned business since 1841. Benefits include paid vacation after 1 year, health insurance plus profit sharing. Your salary is negotiable depending on experience. Contact Stephen Hillenmeyer, C/O Hillenmeyer Nursery, 2370 Sandersville Road, Lexington, KY 40511. 2/88

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Must have 5 years experience in major commercial landscape construction projects and a thorough knowledge of building construction.

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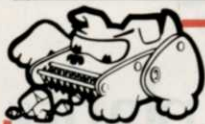
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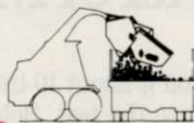
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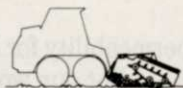


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**PRODUCTION/SALES/MANAGEMENT** — Aggressive Texas full-service landscape firm now accepting resumes for entry level positions in sales, production and management. Excellent opportunities for career, growth oriented persons. Send full resume to LM Box 443. 1/88

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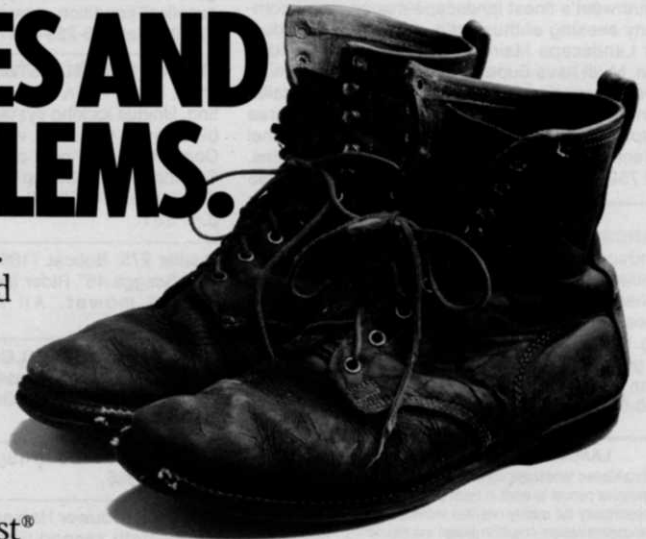
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