

chasing agents to project seasonal needs, then ships products to exact locations.

Can't have it both ways

Yet some manufacturers such as Walker Manufacturing Co. are "staying the course," opting to exclusively sell through distributors and dealers who they believe supply important aftermarket service, says Bob Walker. For his company, industry consolidation has forced a "fork-in-the-road" decision.



Bob Walker

"It doesn't seem possible to have it both ways — sell direct to big customers (large landscape companies) and also sell through dealers, although some manufacturers will probably try to

straddle the fence and say they can do both," Walker says.

It's not that Walker is eager to turn down business from national landscape companies. He hopes they do purchase Walker mowers.

"But if they do, they will be buying from a Walker dealer — not buying because it is the lowest fleet price available," he says. "Business strategy comes down to deciding who is your backbone or core customer. At Walker, we believe our biggest opportunity and fortune rests with customers who need dealer service. Therefore, we have made the decision not to sell direct to national accounts."

They need us

Ron Kujawa, who is in the unique position of heading both a major landscape company and an equipment dealership, says manufacturers aren't about to abandon their dealers; they can't afford to.

"No matter how large the (landscape

companies are that are a result of mergers and acquisitions, they're still an insignificant part of the overall industry," says Kujawa, whose Milwaukee-area landscape business is one of the largest in Wisconsin and who is also the exclusive dealer for Excel Hustler in the state. "There are so many contractors out there it is incredible. Every year, there is a number that comes into the business and a number that go out."

It's these new contractors that a local dealer has a better chance of discovering and converting into customers. Manufacturers don't have the resources to find and sell to them.

"Everybody knows who the big contractors are, the municipalities and the other big buyers. Everybody is knocking on their doors," Kujawa says.

Another factor weighing in a dealer's favor is parts and service. Kujawa concedes that it's possible for a manufacturer to ship parts directly to end-users, but most landscapers, particularly start-ups and small companies, still don't have the expertise or facilities to do their own equipment repairs and service.

Kujawa concedes that manufacturers will chase the business of the consolidated landscape companies by offering them better prices than they offer small contractors,

Dance with who 'brung ya'

As landscape contractors, manufacturers, distributors and dealers work to find their place in the evolving distribution network, it behooves them to respect what each brings to the table, says Tom Walker, president of Outdoor Equipment Co. in Chesterfield, Mo.

"All must recognize each other's needs and jointly craft their roles in each other's successes," Tom Walker believes. "I think it's time for some basic banners:

- Manufacturer's motto: We'll dance with who brung us.
- Distribution's motto: We only service what we sell.
- Landscape contractor's motto: We profit from running equipment, not buying it."

Keep options open with suppliers

Bob Andrews might be like a lot you—he wants to maintain strong relationships with several suppliers. That way, if one is bought out or consolidated with another, he still has a source for products.

"We try dividing our purchases to a variety of suppliers," says Andrews, operator of The Greenskeeper with locations in Indianapolis and southern Indiana. "We buy some fertilizer from Lesco, some from The Andersons and some from Knox. The same goes for pesticides."

Nevertheless, Andrews says he's concerned that as the lawn/landscape industry continues to consolidate that product distribution will also consolidate.

"Different distributors traditionally have different lines, and as they consolidate there are fewer distributors and less access to certain lines," he says. "It impacts how we buy, our choices and our available selection. We've noticed a smaller selection of materials already."



Bob Andrews

so what's new? Most dealers routinely sweeten offers to their largest and most loyal clients anyway. Are these savings significant enough to give the big buyer that much of a competitive advantage over another well-established but smaller company? Not really, Kujawa believes.



Ron Kujawa

'Instant customers'

Echo, the maker of commercial hand-held power equipment in Lake Zurich, IL, is not unlike any other equipment, chemical or seed supplier that's eager to establish relationships with the management teams of the consolidated landscape companies.

"Even though we estimate that the consolidations involve only a small percent of the industry, they represent huge customers," a spokesperson at Echo tells *LM*. "We'll hear about a giant merger (the creation of which we call a 'superscaper') and they become a huge customer instantly."

But, consolidation alone won't be enough to cause Echo to change the way it distributes its products.

"Echo is committed to the dealers or distributors who have been loyal for a long time," the spokesman adds. For one thing, smaller firms continue to be the core of Echo's sales. "Also, the local dealer is more ideally equipped to handle a problem in 24 hours than a company working from corporate direct sales," he says.

Yet distributors and dealers note that consolidation among landscape contractors is but one piece of a rapidly evolving industry puzzle. Some frustrated distributors and dealers say they're more concerned about being limited by demands for large inventories and by shrinking margins.

More important, some manufacturers

How strong is your dealer's future?

As equipment dealers brace for change, they're carefully studying market niches and positioning themselves to provide unique services and solutions to commercial and consumer customers. Is your dealer or distributor making any of these moves?

- ▶ Getting away from expensive, high-volume, drive-by locations
- ▶ Setting up multiple locations and superstores to reach a wider variety of customers
- ▶ Aggressively acquiring neighboring dealers to gain much-needed purchasing clout and qualify for various manufacturer programs
- ▶ Taking on more commercial business because most landscape contractors depend on after-sale service
 - ▶ Adding more trucks and trailers to pick up and deliver equipment
 - ▶ Maintaining backup inventories for equipment loaners and rentals to eliminate customer downtime
 - ▶ Extending evening service hours or even considering a night shift to ensure overnight turnaround
 - ▶ Marketing themselves better and/or adding outside sales representatives
 - ▶ Examining ways to hold down operating costs and gain economies of scale
 - ▶ Banding together to form trading associations or co-ops to purchase equipment and materials at prices that rival the nationals

have downplayed the significance of dealer-based networks for the siren song of the mass merchants. In fact, several manufacturers have opted to disregard their dealer and distributor structure and sell to the newly consolidated companies on a direct basis.

Changing distribution landscape

At least one competing retailer — Home Depot — is testing its own in-store service centers, marking the first time it will compete head-to-head against lawn care dealers for service, not just equipment. If the Atlanta-based giant goes national with its service strategy, smaller, consumer-oriented lawn equipment dealers fear it will drive them out of business. They claim that Home Depot doesn't even have to be profitable; just stay in business long enough to eliminate competitors.

Such changes have dealers who depend on consumer business moving into the commercial market, particularly small and medium size contractors who depend on after-sale service and warranty work.

Companies such as Van Water & Rogers Inc., Austin, TX, a leading distributor of professional pest control products, is pushing to become a national presence among a handful of distributors such as Lesco, United Horticultural Supply, Terra and Helena. Meanwhile, regional distributors such as Turf Partners are acquiring companies, and local distributors are gobbling up market share by offering service solutions to customers.

Will your dealer survive?

What's clear is that a smaller network of dealers will be around in a few years, industry experts say. Those that survive will need to educate themselves to understand everything from the dynamics of profit to quality performance in order to stay competitive, says Maynard Helgaas, president of the Equipment Dealers Foundation located in St. Louis. **LM**

—Mike Perrault, Susan Gibson and Ron Hall

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Landscapes 'go native'

Thoughtful design, proper plant selection and careful installation will give your clients a natural landscape that's pleasing to the eye and easy to maintain

By JOHN C. FECH, Ph.D.

As attractive as wildflowers can be, they are not the only choice (or even the most appropriate choice) for naturalizing a landscape.

As maintenance dollars become scarce, landscape owners and managers are looking at the alternatives. You might convince the owner of the site to increase the maintenance budget. You could prioritize sections of the landscape, reclassifying them as low, medium and high maintenance, instead of treating all parts similarly. Or you could create a partially or completely naturalized landscape.

Going wild?

You may picture a naturalized landscape as a house surrounded by a field of wildflowers or the removal of all improved or ornamental cultivars of shrubs, grasses and trees, allowing the seeds in the soil to take over. This is far from the truth and quite different from the actual realities of a well planned naturalized landscape.

A naturalized landscape begins with sound, sustainable landscape design principles. It blends aesthetics, function and maintenance within existing land forms. It contains native, low-input plants and a framework for low maintenance when finished, including reduced chemical and water usage. It will provide habitat for wildlife and is an attractive alternative where low maintenance and subtle beauty are desired.

Lots of benefits

- ▶ Native plantings can be beautiful, offering color and texture not seen in exotic species.
- ▶ They contribute to diversity in the landscape, which is crucial in this age of "cookie-cutter landscape design."
- ▶ Native plants offer food and shelter to wildlife.



► Native plants can highlight local and regional "best kept secrets."

► They normally require low inputs of pesticides, fertilizers and water.

► Native plants, in a natural landscape, generally don't require much maintenance — pruning, transplanting, staking, etc.

Right plant, right place

Naturalizing a landscape usually results from of a change in the plan for the site. In some cases, the owners or stakeholders of a landscape space noticed an attractive naturalized landscape on a recent trip or even in another part of their neighborhood.

A common mistake is to skip the design process and implement a quick and easy solution. For example, spraying the existing plants with Roundup and reseeding the entire landscape to native grasses would be a huge mistake. Besides the drastic impact

"right place" applies. Consider factors such as shade, sun, wind, views, soil pH and slope. Would you plant mountain wildflowers in Dallas? Or install a xeric landscape in Seattle? Of course not. Know the hardiness, color and textural features of each plant, as well as invasive qualities.

Ideally, the overall design concept of a naturalized landscape will dictate a program. A typical program statement for a naturalized design may include minimized turf areas, creation of ornamental beds containing native plants and screening with native trees, among others. Specific plants are chosen at the *end* of the design process, not at the beginning.

Make the site right

Site preparation is just as important in a redesign as in the initial installation. Eliminate existing undesirable plants. Use herbicides like Roundup, Reward or Finale to remove such plants without preventing installation of desirable plants soon after the application. In some cases, a rope wick-type applicator is the best tool to use, as it limits spray drift to desirable native plants.

The soils must drain well and be fertile. Add compost before planting grass and wildflowers to refresh nutrients and aid plant rooting. Once the site is prepared, the plants can be installed. The key concept is to create a rooting area that allows for lateral expansion of the root system, aiding establishment.

In general, the woodier the plant material, the less effective it is to incorporate compost. Roots of herbaceous perennials seldom grow more than a few feet beyond the planting hole, making it feasible to modify the planting site with compost.

Trees and shrubs, however, are likely to produce a lateral root system extending 20 to 100 feet beyond the planting hole. In a typical residential landscape, the roots of a bur oak will fill the entire back yard. So it is generally not practical to amend soil to the planting area for trees and shrubs.

A decade ago, seeding was the only real option for native plantings. Today, you can find native plants in the form of bedding plants, plugs or even sod. The choice to seed or install potted plants is less expensive, but establishment can take two growing seasons. Plants are more costly but establish quickly in a naturalized landscape.

Pay attention to maintenance

Irrigation and weed control are the most important maintenance practices to establish a naturalized landscape. Many native plants require low levels of fertility and are tolerant of pests. Mulch new plantings to provide moisture retention and weed suppression, particularly when installing plugs or pots of native plants.

Seeded plantings are more difficult, since irrigation to encourage establishment of native species also encourages native weeds to germinate and compete. Herbicides such as Plateau can suppress weed growth and allow desirable species, such as those in the Compositae family (Illinois bundleflower, plains coreopsis) to establish.

Tell the property owners that the irrigation requirements are much greater for installation than in the maintenance phase. A reasonable approach is to install a temporary irrigation system, which is designed to function for a year or two. In most cases, such a system is inexpensive and allows adequate time for establishment.

So why naturalize? Many landscape stakeholders are jumping at the chance to create a lower maintenance space while retaining color, texture and high aesthetic appeal. At the very least, the proper consideration of a naturalized landscape will take the owner through a sound landscape renovation or rethinking process, which may lead to other enhancements or refinements. **LM**


—John Fech is with the University of Nebraska, Lincoln.



Properly used native plants can add variety to a landscape, as well as providing food and shelter to wildlife.

of such an approach, imagine the reactions of the neighboring property owners. It's crucial that you educate the owners about the importance of careful planning for effect and impact.

Education must also take into account the actual site and the environmental factors. In all cases, the phrase, "right plant,



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Guide to Overseeding '99

Whether you manage golf courses, lawns, sports fields or commercial properties, it pays to pay attention to the latest overseeding techniques and developments. This guide offers insight into overseeding trends, from seed selection and seed bed preparation to critical timing and application.

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Don't underestimate overseeding details

Overseeding success depends on seed selection, timing, seed bed preparation and hands-on management

By MIKE PERRAULT/
Associate Editor

In the narrow Coachella Valley (1.5 to 3 mile wide by 30 mile long) in Southern California, superintendents take overseeding seriously. Very seriously.

In fact, for most superintendents at the more than 100 Palm Springs-area golf courses packed into the narrow desert valley, it's the single most important project they undertake every year.

"Your whole report card is based on the outcome," says Sam Zeigler Jr., superintendent at The Lakes Country Club in Palm Desert, CA.

Most courses close down anywhere from a week to a month every fall to overseed, with upscale courses spending more than \$100,000 and other courses investing 10 to 15% of their annual budgets. The stakes are high, and success can ultimately determine career paths.

Evolving strategies

Overseeding success is equally important to superintendents elsewhere across the country as they overseed fairways, roughs and even go wall-to-wall in many instances. Once reserved for resorts and professional tour stops, winter overseeding is a growing trend at private and daily fee courses from the deep South through the transition zone and northward.

Superintendents say they must stay competitive with neighboring courses and meet expectations of members or winter visitors.

Yet overseeding is no panacea. As superintendents work to establish a cool-season turf cover atop the dormant bermudagrass or other warm-season turfgrass, there are ever-spiraling costs, inevitable problems with spring transition and unpredictable weather and occasional cries from the irate, inconvenienced golfer.

Overseeding trends are regional. For example, while some areas report more overseeding of fairways, the practice has died down somewhat in the USGA Green Section's Mid-Continent region because populations of creeping bentgrass have increased over the last decade, says Mid-Continent region director Paul Vermeulen. And greens are being overseeded after aeration with new varieties of creeping bentgrass.

When USGA Green Section Southeast Region director Patrick O'Brien speaks at golf association meetings, he says no topic "stirs up the pot" more than overseeding dormant bermudagrass fairways for winter play.

It's a hot topic among golf course superintendents, too, whether it's discussed over coffee or during an increasing number of local and regional overseeding forums and roundtable sessions. The only sure thing about overseeding is that it's a constantly changing agronomic undertaking. Just consider the fact that in the 16 years that superintendent Cary Lee has overseeded Heritage Palms CC in Indio, CA, he has never done it the same way two years in a row.

Popular *Poa trivialis*

For years, perennial ryegrass was the preferred overseeding grass on many golf courses, primarily because it germinates fast (typically five to seven days), has fine leaf texture, dark green color, seedling vigor and better disease and traffic resistance than annual ryegrass.

But fine fescues, creeping bentgrass, intermediate ryegrass and annual ryegrass are sometimes viable options, and *Poa trivialis* (Roughstalk bluegrass) is gaining fast in popularity. This year such options may be even more seriously considered by superintendents in 20 mid-Atlantic states, who are looking for ways to cope with the serious outbreak of that perennial ryegrass-zapping gray leaf spot disease.

Superintendent Mark S. Kubic now uses 100% *Poa trivialis* to overseed greens at Fiddlesticks CC in Fort Meyers, FL, in part because he can mow it shorter than ryegrass, giving his golfers what they like: fast greens. Superintendents say they can set mowing

heights at 5/32 of an inch even as *Poa trivialis* establishes itself.

Because *Poa trivialis* has 2 to 3 million seeds per pound vs. 270,000 seeds per pound for perennial ryegrass, it requires less preparation in order to germinate, superintendents add, meaning less disruption to golfers.

Poa trivialis and ryegrass mixes are also popular, especially for courses that must keep costs down. That's because *Poa trivialis* production pales in comparison to perennial ryegrass production. In 1997, for example, the turfgrass seed industry produced and shipped approximately 185 million pounds of ryegrass, compared to 3 million pounds of *Pro trivialis* seed.

Poa trivialis does have its weak points, however. It is susceptible to diseases, such as dollar spot, and has poor wear tolerance and a natural yellow-green color. Hot spots, or dry areas, may develop and require daily hand syringing, and it tends to die out earlier in the spring because of low heat tolerance.

Overseeding overview

For many operations, overseeding is a semi-annual ordeal: overseeding with cool-season grasses in the fall and trying to battle with those same grasses to get the bermudagrass up and running in the spring.

- Overseeding golf courses is part-and-parcel with maintaining a year-round facility.
- Overseeding sportsfields is essential to maintain turf density under high traffic situations and minimize the potential for injuries.
- Overseeding commercial properties is deemed important for sales and identification by the clients with the high-end appearance of the property.
- Overseeding residential property demands vary, based on the location, the expectations of the client and comparisons with other residential properties.

You could probably wake up most people involved in overseeding in the middle of the night, shine a bright light into their eyes and they could rhyme off the steps and timing required for a successful fall overseeding operation. According to North Carolina State University (www.cals.ncsu.edu/course/cs055/overseed.html), rules of thumb to follow include:

- For tees and greens, basic procedures prior to fall overseeding include: reduce or discontinue nitrogen fertilization, core and aerify turf, verticut in several directions, topdress turf and reduce mowing height.
- For lawns, fairways and athletic fields, basic procedures prior to fall overseeding are much less intense with close mowing being the primary requirement, although coring and/or vertical mowing should be considered if thatch is heavy.
- For seed application for greens and tees: seed in at least two directions; light vertical mowing followed by topdressing; drag or brush topdressing and seed into turf canopy.
- For seed application for lawns and athletic fields: seed in two directions; brush or drag seed into turf surface; topdressing helpful but may be impractical.

—Nancy Stairs

A timing tightrope

Superintendent Richard Sall at Tamarisk CC in Rancho Mirage, CA, lobbied his board of directors recently to delay overseeding by a week, until Oct. 12. That may not seem like a big concession, but to him it made all the difference in the world. Cooler temperatures and other favorable conditions increased the odds of success.

Other Palm Springs superintendents have had to adhere to early or mid-September overseeding schedules despite 115°F daytime temperatures, making establishment of overseeded ryegrass in competing bermudagrass difficult, if not impossible.

In other parts of the country, timing is equally critical. Superintendents say seeding too early can result in excessive bermudagrass or zoysiagrass competition and the increased likelihood of diseases such as Pythium blight. Seeding too late in the fall may result in weak, delayed or reduced seed germination because of low temperatures.

Optimum overseeding time is when late summer/early fall night temperatures are consistently within the 50°F range. Or when soil temperatures at a 4-inch depth are in the mid-70s, or the average midday air temperatures remain in the low 70s. Cool-season grass seed germination is favored by temperatures between 50 and 70°F. Time overseeding at least 20 to 30 days before the first expected killing frost.

Other important considerations

- Plant growth regulators such as Primo and Embark are being used to smooth transitions by stifling the growth of overseeded ryegrass without retarding the bermudagrass green-up. In the Carolinas, for example, they use it in the fall to give overseeding grasses an advantage. In the spring, it allows the bermudagrass to emerge a little sooner.

- To better shock the bermudagrass, some superintendents say it's better to raise the height of cut on fairways to loosen the canopy. Then scalping or shocking will have more of an impact.

- In Palm Springs, more superintendents are watering light and frequently on overseeded turf to discourage deep root systems. They're also going to lighter renovations to prevent seed from moving and having the

Most common causes of failure on a golf course

- poor seedbed preparation
- planting too early or too late
- seedling diseases
- herbicide injury (pre- and post-emergence)
- over- or under-watering
- fertilizer burn
- mowing with dull mowers

RICHARD L. DUBLE, TURFGRASS SPECIALIST,
TEXAS AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION

same bare spots show up every spring. Many are using flail mowers.

- Three to four weeks prior to overseeding, superintendents say it's important to reduce or stop fertilization to minimize competitive bermudagrass growth and avoid predisposing the grass to winter injury. Four to six weeks prior to overseeding, they say it helps to cultivate the soil by coring and then allow the cores to dry.

OVERSEEDING'S HIDDEN COSTS

It takes more than seed to overseed.

In fact, many superintendents underestimate overseeding costs by not considering all related items — water, labor, extra equipment, fertilizers, herbicides and growth regulators. Here are items to consider when budgeting for your next overseeding project. Certified Superintendent Bill Anderson at Carmel CC in Charlotte, NC, compiled a line-item cost analysis for 18 holes (or 30 acres), showing he spent \$137,050.

- Seed — At 400 pounds per acre, figuring \$1.10 per pound, Anderson spends \$13,200 for 12,000 pounds of seed.
- Fertilizers — Estimate 30 pounds at \$50 per acre for a total of \$1,500.
- Herbicides — Estimate 30 pounds at \$60 per acre for a total of \$1,800.
- Growth regulators — Estimate 30 pounds at \$215 per acre for a total of \$6,450.
- Water — It obviously depends what you're paying, but Anderson spends about \$4,500 in additional costs to irrigate 30 overseeded acres.
- Labor — Anderson figures \$2,500 in additional labor costs for a total of \$45,000.
- Equipment — Drop spreader, \$2,000; verticut reels, \$8,700; vacuum, \$23,500; fairway mower, \$30,400.



Lawn care overseeding: room for growth

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

By RON HALL/
Managing Editor

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."

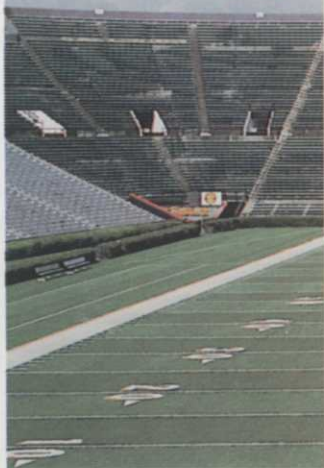
What the customer wants

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



How the Irish stay green

“Overseeding is more of a playability and safety issue than it is an aesthetic issue,” says Dale Getz, University of Notre Dame turfgrass manager.

“The aesthetics come into play more in how you prepare the field — mowing patterns, striping, that sort of thing.”

Getz has his crews aerify, partially drag and break up cores and fill aerification holes about 3/8-inch from the top. Crews then broadcast seed, break up the rest of the cores and topdress when possible, he says.

“That’s our preferred method, because it gets the seed to the depth we need it for good seed-to-soil contact, and we know we’re not losing it to birds, wind and desiccation.”

Constant overseeding

With athletic fields being used constantly for everything from football to lacrosse to soccer and even frisbee, it’s no small challenge to keep the turf vibrant. Seed is put down as much as every other week, in between official and recreational games.

“Whenever we open up the ground for any reason, whether it’s for aerification, spiking or verticutting, we’ll put seed down any way we can to get that seed-to-soil contact,” Getz says. “We go through a lot of seed.”

Getz broadcasts seed prior to practices and games to keep viable seed in the ground at all times to take advantage of favorable weather conditions for germination.

With 7- to 21-day germination rates for most varieties of Kentucky bluegrass, keeping plenty of seed in the ground increases the odds of success for the relatively ten-

der juvenile plants that may fall prey to desiccation in the first couple weeks.

Why rye?

Getz favors Kentucky bluegrass for his sports turf in South Bend, IN, but he finds that overseeding with pregerminated perennial ryegrass gives him an edge in the fall. “When the fields start to get worn out, say a soccer practice field, you can get the rye to sprout and in two days you’ve got grass coming up. And rye, unlike bluegrass, is a pretty strong and tough juvenile plant. So it can stand a little bit of wear and tear.”

That means if the Notre Dame football team has a three-week stint away from home, Getz can grow a stand of ryegrass by the time the next home game rolls around. “Whereas with bluegrass, pregerminated or not, even if you do get it up, it’s so tender when it’s young that it just doesn’t withstand the wear and tear.”

Getz exclusively overseeds with Kentucky bluegrass varieties each spring because it’s the turfgrass he wants for fall sports.

Part of the challenge for Getz is carefully studying NTEP trials to determine which seed varieties best fit his needs. “For football and other fall sports, I’m looking for a bluegrass that can maintain color late into the fall,” he says. “And it has got to have good toughness after it quits growing late in the fall.”

As Getz surveys the frozen ground only days before his mid-March baseball opener, he notes that spring requires a different approach when selecting bluegrass seed. “Here, I’m looking for a bluegrass that will give me quick greenup.”



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Circle No. 117 on Reader Inquiry Card



Transition can be tricky

Tom Burns, turf manager of The Texas Rangers baseball team, has learned that Mother Nature can throw a knuckleball when it comes to overseeding

With nearly two decades of experience under his belt caring for sports turf in Texas, Arizona, Florida and Ohio, Texas Rangers turf manager Tom Burns knows that overseeding is rarely a cut-and-dried procedure. Mother Nature can always throw a knuckleball.

This spring in Arlington, TX, for example, spring storms combined with problematic shade to cloud his overseeding operations. Unusually warm temperatures caused the bermudagrass to break dormancy early, so Burns found himself overseeding later than ever — in mid-February. “You have to roll with the punches,” says Burns, who believes flexibility may be a turf manager’s greatest overseeding strategy.

Overseeding challenges and frustrations have contributed to his graying head of hair, Burns insists, but they won’t deter him from overseeding altogether. The perennial ryegrass provides wear tolerance to his dormant bermudagrass fields, enhances playability, and makes for better footing.

To keep himself up to speed on the latest overseeding techniques and developments, Burns moderates and participates in Sports Turf Managers Association overseeding roundtables. They’re lively, informative and opinionated sessions, he says. “You can have 100 people at a roundtable discussion and you’re going to have probably 95 different overseeding techniques,” says Burns, who has his opinions, too.

“The establishment phase of overseeding is not the difficult part, generally,” he says. “The hard part is getting the nice, smooth transition from the ryegrass to the bermuda. Some of the ryegrasses that are out there now are so heat tolerant, it’s hard to get rid of them. It’s hard to get your bermuda back because it’s got so much competition from the rye.”

Burns says he’ll likely go back to overseeding in the fall this year and face spring transition problems as ryegrass hangs on longer than he wants. “I think it’s probably easier to know you’re going into the start of the season with good turf. It’s just more of a security blanket.”

Athletic fields

On athletic fields, overseeding should be considered if the fields are used during the winter and/or early spring months. Coring, slicing prior to and top-dressing following overseeding are necessary steps. A heavy seeding rate (from 30 to 60 lbs./1,000 sq.ft.) is generally advised. But keep in mind that the higher the seeding rate, the faster the turf will die out in the spring due to seedling immaturity; but a lower seeding rate will slow transition back to the permanent grass in the spring. Avoid fertilizing until the new seedlings are established or the competition will crowd them out.

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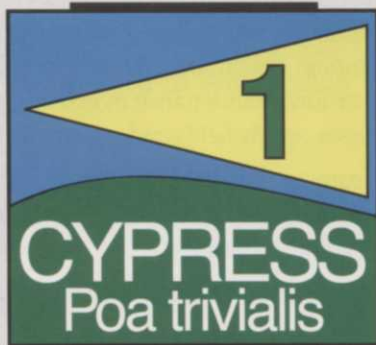


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Cypress

"Highest mean for turf color"

1996-97 putting green overseeding trial, Clemson University.

"Highest quality rating"

of all entries in the 1996 Bermuda Triangle Research Center, Palm Springs, California.

Circle No. 120 on Reader Inquiry Card

When bad things happen to good trees

For urban landscape trees, it's just a matter of time before they are in the wrong place at the wrong time. Avoid many problems before they happen

By NANCY STAIRS/
Technical Editor

The urban landscape is no place for a tree. We plant them because of the benefits they add to the landscape, but for trees, it's often just a matter of time before they're in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Trees are meant to grow in groups where roots are shaded, soil compaction is minimal, nutrients are recycled and, should the trees fall, they damage only other trees. In the man-made landscape, very bad things happen from the start. A tree just dug from the nursery can undergo rough handling, planting delays, a dry root ball and more; all of which stress it considerably. And that's before it's even planted!

Urban jungle

By the time the tree is actually placed in the planting hole, it is already in shock. Then there's the planting hole.

Topsoil? More likely, we see compacted subsoils and, if not, a limited rooting area. Tree wells in the pavement do not offer anything to a tree. And, in most communities, tree roots and the sidewalk are considered to wage a constant battle in the tree lawns. Root pruning is common, and if there is any street construction, virtually no

one tries to limit the damage to the tree roots. Vehicles, lawnmowers and other mechanical damage to the tree trunk take their toll.

Add more insults — tree supports that are never removed or removed too late, poor pruning practices, drought, insects or disease — and you have a comprehensive list of the most common mistreatments affecting the average urban tree.

If you can't take the heat

Trees are pretty tough, but they cannot withstand one stress after another without some negative results. Each of these things on its own would have an effect on a tree,



Trees along roads and streets can suffer from compacted soil and lack of oxygen to roots, poor water movement through the soil, vehicle exhaust, winter road salt and the possibility of damage or vandalism.

and a reasonably healthy tree could withstand many of them. But when many insults occur repeatedly, it can be too much. Limiting some of these practices can go a long way in helping a tree survive and adding value to your site for a long time. Consider these pointers to help survival:



Conks at the base of a tree are a sign of internal decay. Don't ignore these signs.

1. Reduce potential for injury

Repeated injury to surface roots or to the base of a tree opens it to decay organisms, some of which are pretty serious (not just for the tree). Decay that affects the tree roots and/or the base of the tree is serious from a hazard point of view. It affects the structural stability of the tree and increases the possibility for failure. Trees with decay at the base and cavities in the trunk should be inspected by a professional arborist with experience in assessing hazard trees.

Pruning tree roots can affect the stability, as well as reduce the rooting area of a tree, making it tough to get enough water and nutritional elements from the soil. All tree species are not affected to the same extent and some are more sensitive than others, but stability problems below ground and decline above ground are a distinct possibility.

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▲ Surface roots are prone to damage, which opens the stabilizing roots to decay.

▶ Fill added to a sloped site can bury the tree roots to a considerable depth. Virtually no tree can survive this treatment.

An arborist's waking nightmare

- ▶ Observing annuals planted under a tree whose roots have been freshly rototilled.
- ▶ Coming too close to large, bad-tempered dogs chained to trees, nerve-racking for the arborist and damaging to the trees.
- ▶ Finding a tree girdled by a clothes-line tied around the trunk.
- ▶ Noticing a piece of wood used to "push" a tree away from a fence.
- ▶ Seeing a large growing tree pruned to keep it small, "butchered" by the untrained.
- ▶ Watching a person bang a lawn mower into a tree.
- ▶ Telling people about the potential hazard and/or need to remove a tree with large dead branches or an enormous cavity — in their park, playground, yard, parking lot, street — and being ignored.



2. Don't pile on the fill

The addition of fill on a site is a common practice, especially during construction. When construction is in progress, levels of fill can be as deep as 5 feet. If the tree is on a slope — even deeper fill levels are possible. In other cases, trees may have shallow, surface roots (which probably already have mower damage) and fill makes it easier to establish turf and mow.

Why is fill a bad thing for most trees? Think about having a large person sitting directly on your chest. How much oxygen would you be able to get into your lungs? How long could you keep breathing in that situation? Put simply, the roots of the tree require oxygen in order to do their job. The addition of fill will reduce the availability of oxygen and, in essence, smother

the roots. For some trees like tulip poplar or beech, the decline and death of the tree can happen fairly quickly. For others, it may take as long as three to five years before the tree finally dies.

3. Plan ahead

So what can you do?

- When planning for new trees, know which tree species are good for specific situations (size, light, moisture, etc.). Utility companies, state extensions and associations are good sources.
 - When planting trees, check the root ball for moisture and good root condition. Get the tree into the ground with minimal delay. Emphasize the need for regular watering.
 - Do not install support stakes unless the site requires it or the tree is large. Where support stakes are necessary, remove them after a year.
 - Maintain a mulch ring around the base of the trees — a ring two to three inches deep that doesn't touch the trunk. This reduces the chance of injury by mowers or string trimmers.
 - Suggest perennials under trees so that the root disturbance happens only once.
 - When relandscaping or during construction, decide if the tree is valuable and should be saved and then protect the tree from as much damage as possible. Limit construction activity to outside the dripline of the crown and recognize that changing the grade, even away from the tree, can change the way moisture moves on the site. A certified arborist can help.
 - If you see conks, cavities, decay or dead limbs, advise that the tree be inspected by a certified arborist for potential hazard, particularly where a target exists (buildings, playground, etc.).
- Reducing damage and other insults to trees will help to increase their life and value. If you don't like trees, consider this a guide for saboteurs. **LM**

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