COMMON NAMES OF TURF GRASSES

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Our ordinary plants usually have two names; the botanical and the common name. The botanical name is in Latin and serves readily to identify the plant, no matter what the native tongue of the writer or reader. Common names can have no such universality as they vary with the language. Also there are often several different common names in one language. When a plant grows in widely separated countries even though the same language is spoken there are likely to be many common names for it. Some of these names are naturally of native origin but have been adopted by the English speaking population.

The well known turf grass to which, in this country, we most commonly refer as Bermuda grass, is known in English speaking countries under a great variety of names. In Australia it is known under the names of couch or Indian couch, doob, and kweek. In Africa it is called doob or dub, couch, kweek, quick or fine quick, and Scotch. In India the names given it are doob or dhoob, Durba or Durva, creeping panic grass and hariali. In Cuba it is known as Caña maza, and yerba fina. In Egypt it is called Neguil. In Hawaii it is referred to as manienie. In the Malay States it is known as serangoon.

Even in one country there may be a large assortment of common names for the same species of grass. In the United States, for instance, our common Bermuda grass is referred to under different common names. In California and along the Gulf

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States it is frequently called devil's grass. In the northern limits of its range it is commonly known as wire-grass. Elsewhere in limited districts in this country it is referred to as Bahama, dogstooth, reed grass, Scotch, and scutch grass.

Not only are there several common names used for the same species of plant but often the same common name in separate districts may designate distinctly different species. The name herds grass, for instance, is applied in the southern United States to the species which is designated in the following list as redtop. In New York and New England it is frequently used to designate the species listed as timothy. In England it frequently designates the grass listed as velvet grass.

A variety of common names for any one grass may serve a useful purpose and may not be misleading when each name is restricted to local use. With modern increased interest in turf grasses, however, and the wider distribution of information on them, there is certain to be increased confusion due to the rising tower of Babel of common names applied to various species used for turf in different parts of the world. With the more general exchange of seed not only between different sections of this country but also between widely separated countris, this confusion has become significant economically.

It not infrequently happens that a buyer purchases a variety of grass under a name to which he is accustomed, only to learn after the seed has been planted that the grass he meant to buy and the one the seed dealer designated by the same name were two different species. Often this works out to the disappointment of the customer and consequently to the disadvantage of the seed dealer.

Botanists have attempted to make the names of plants of universal application. To this end they have given each plant

a Latin name by which it may be known the world over, regardless of language. The individual plants have been described as species; the closely related species have been grouped together into genera (singular, genus). The botanical name by which the plant is designated consists therefore of two names (binomial system); first, the name of the genus, and second, the name of the species. This system is comparable to listing the names of individuals in a telephone directory, with the family name first. The scientific classification of plants and the binomial system which are used today originated with the noted Swedish botanist, Linnaeus, in 1753.

Botanical Classification

Any effort to classify nature, however, leads to difficulties. The system works effectively for plants which exhibit clean-cut characteristics placing them unquestionably in species or pigeon holes by themselves as distinct from more or less closely related species. Nature, however, does not draw sharp lines and frequently border-line plants are found which do not fit into any previously established pigeon hole. One botanist may therefore believe it wise to place it in one pigeon hole; another, in some closely related species or pigeon hole; while still another may think the variations are sufficient to justify building still another pigeon hole in which to place the plant.

When a botanist describes a plant as belonging to a new species or variety he must publish an accurate description of it. In addition, the particular specimen which he has described must be pressed, dried and filed in an herbarium (a collection of preserved plants). This is called the type specimen. His re-

sponsibility for the botanical name is indicated by his name, its abbreviation or his initial following the name of the species; for example, the L. so frequently attached to botanical names refers to Linnaeus.

Descriptions, no matter how carefully made at the time, may later be misleading. Adjectives such as long, tall, etc., unless accompanied by actual measurements are frequently meaningless. In a critical study of scientific names it is therefore desirable not only to read the author's original description but also to study the plant from which this description was made. The original specimen can usually be borrowed from the herbarium in which it is filed since it is the practice for each herbarium to loan its specimens to workers in other herbaria, just as libraries loan their books to other libraries.

Confusion in Botanical Names

Botanical names have been subject to confusion for several reasons. In some cases one author may describe a plant as being a new species without knowing that the same species had been described previously by another author. For instance, Kentucky bluegrass was described by Schreber as *Poa viridis* and by Elliott as *Poa augustifolia.* When however, botanists discovered that the grasses described by Schreber and by Elliott were identical with the *Poa pratensis* described earlier by Linnaeus the use of the later names was discontinued. The name under which a plant was described by the first author is accepted as the correct scientific name and all other names under which it may have been described subsequently are listed as synonyms.

In other cases the same Latin name has been used for different

species, usually by men who did not know of the earlier use of the name. For instance, Pollick, not realizing that Linnaeus had described Kentucky bluegrass under the name *Poa pratensis,* described an entirely different species of Poa under the same name. Here again the scientific name must be used for the plant which is first described under that name. So in this case *Poa pratensis* L. is the correct scientific name for Kentucky bluegrass. When, therefore, a botanist writes *Poa pratensis* L. the plant described by Linneaus is meant and not the plant described by Pollick under the same name.

Other cases of confusion arise when one worker considers a form sufficiently distinct to warrant making a new species of it, whereas another botanist, working with the same plant considers the differences so small as to warrant making only a new variety and not a new species.

Sources of Common Names

It is possible, therefore, to trace the botanical names to their source and to decide which shall be considered the correct name. In the case of common names, however, such decisions usually are not possible. Many of our common names are of ancient origin, long antedating the binomial system of Latin names devised by Linnaeus.

Oftentimes in the history of the use of a word there has been a gradual change in its meaning, so that at the present time the name is used in a sense entirely different from the original. For instance, as first used in England, the term "bent" meant a grassy field. It was used in this sense by north European writers from the time of the earliest appearance of Northern literature.

Even rushes, the stalks and the heads of plantain, and sedges, have been called bents. Then the term became restricted in its use first to the various grasses and eventually in this country to those grasses belonging to the genus Agrostis.

Common names also may originate from the locality in which the plants are grown. Such, for instance, is the case with Kentucky bluegrass, *Poa pratensis.* This species was introduced early into the United States and became established in many regions. It attracted most attention in pastures in Kentucky and soon became known as Kentucky bluegrass. In our country this name has replaced the old English name, smooth-stalked meadow grass. The name Kentucky bluegrass is now also used by seedsmen in South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, but not in England.

Common names are frequently descriptive of the plant. They may refer to its vegetative characteristics, such as smooth-stalked meadow grass; the characteristics of the flower heads, as redtop, in which case the name refers to the reddish tinge of the flower heads when seen in mass; the characteristics of the growth habits such as creeping bent; the length of life such as annual bluegrass or perennial ryegrass. Such terms may be confusing because other related species may show the same characteristics. Such is the case with the name creeping bent, which name has been widely applied to *Agrostis palustris* Huds. although other species of Agrostis also "creep" by means of stolons.

In some cases the common names include words that show a botanical relationship. In England the term meadow grass has long been used to designate the various species of Poa, as, for instance, smooth-stalked meadow grass, rough-stalked meadow grass, flat-stalked meadow grass, and wood meadow

grass. Smooth-stalked meadow grass became famous in Kentucky and soon became generally recognized in this country as Kentucky bluegrass. It was natural therefore to use the term bluegrass for the other species of Poa grown here. Although bluegrass is not an ideal term since the color of the grass is not blue the name is in such general use that it would be impractical to substitute another for it.

TURF CULTURE has, therefore, accepted the term bluegrass for all of the species of Poa. This indicates the botanical relationship between them as, for instance, annual bluegrass, Canada bluegrass, wood bluegrass, and trivialis bluegrass. The latter name will be used by TURF CULTURE for *Poa trivialis*. Objections have been raised repeatedly by dealers and others to the various names which include the word "rough" in connection with this species as in turf it is distinctly not rough. *Poa trivialis* is now frequently referred to simply as trivialis. As this name has been found to be convenient in common usage, has no objectionable implications and, unlike other common names that have been suggested, does not misrepresent the range of usefulness of the species, TURF CULTURE will adopt as its common name, trivialis bluegrass (pronounced with a long "a").

COMMON NAMES MAY BE FIXED

Some of the confusion among common names may be avoided if a deliberate effort is made to encourage the use of a single name in any one country for one species.

Before 1930 a number of names were used for the grasses of the Colonial bent type. Besides other names it was called

Colonial bent, Rhode Island bent, Astoria bent and browntop. In the interest of those buying and selling seed of turf grasses the United States Golf Association Green Section in 1930 took up with seedsmen, greenkeepers and others interested, the question of the name preferred for the grass commonly called Colonial bent, browntop, Rhode Island bent and other names. The ballot was almost unanimous for the use of the name Colonial bent to displace all others.

Common names cannot be universal since they vary with the language, but it is desirable that a certain common name be accepted as the name for one and only one species or variety wherever that plant is known to people speaking one language. With English speaking peoples widely scattered over the globe it is not probable that complete uniformity in the use of common names will ever be attained. Local usage will develop local names, but it is hoped that the publication of the lists in this paper may lead to some greater uniformity in the use of the common names of widely used species.

In the first list are given the botanical names of grasses used for turf in the English speaking countries. TURF CULTURE uses those botanical names accepted by the United States Department of Agriculture and the National Herbarium of the Smithsonian Institution. Most of these are listed in the Manual of Grasses of the United States by the late A. S. Hitchcock, agrostologist representing both of these organizations.

Following the botanical name for each grass is given a list of common names used for that species in English speaking countries. The name which TURF CULTURE will adopt is given first in heavy type. The fact that a name is chosen does not mean that it is considered the best possible name, but rather

that it is the most widely used and at the present time at least appears to be the most convenient one.

In the second list the common names are arranged alphabetically with an appropriate reference to the species to which they belong. While there are perhaps local names not found, the lists are believed to represent most of the common names used in seed catalogs and recent literature of the English speaking countries. Certain names, chiefly old ones, have been omitted as it is not possible at present to be certain of the species to which they have been applied.

TURF CULTURE would welcome from its readers any other names of turf grasses that may be in common use but which do not appear in these lists.

LIST OF BOTANICAL NAMES FOR TURF GRASSES

SCIENTIFIC NAME	COMMON NAMES
Agropyron cristatum (L.) Beauv.	**crested wheatgrass**, desert wheatgrass.
Agrostis alba L.	**redtop**, English bent, fiorin, herds grass, marsh bent, southern bent, white bent, whitetop.
Agrostis canina L.	**velvet bent**, brown bent, brown creeping bent, dog bent.
Agrostis nigra With.	**black bent**, black couch.
Agrostis palustris Huds.	**creeping bent**, carpet bent, Coos Bay or Coos County bent, fiorin, seaside bent.
Agrostis tenuis Sibth.	**Colonial bent**, bent, browntop, Burden's grass, dew grass, English bent, English browntop, fine bent, furze top, New Zealand bent, Prince Edward Island bent, purple bent, Rhode Island bent, South