

The Fallacy of Sowing Fine Turf Grasses in Spring

C. V. PIPER AND R. A. OAKLEY

Waste in any form in golf course making and maintenance should be avoided wherever it is possible to do so. One of the greatest sources of waste is in the sowing of seed. The rate of seeding is commonly too heavy. Much poor seed is sown which, if simple germination tests were made beforehand, would not have been used. Seed of grasses poorly or not at all adapted to the locality or to the purpose intended too frequently is selected. But these are not the chief causes. The greatest waste comes from reseeding old greens and fairways and sowing new ones at the wrong time of the year. Under the best of conditions the reseeding of old turf produces results of very doubtful value, and when the reseeding is done in the spring in most of the northern part of the golf belt, the effort and seed are almost sure to be wasted. It is desired here to call attention to the mistaken practice of sowing seed of the fine northern turf grasses in the spring of the year and to point out some of the reasons why the practice is unsound.

When the question is asked, "Why are lawns and greens sown in the spring?" the answer is invariably, "Because it is the right time to sow seed." This reply smacks of reasoning from a faulty premise. True enough, spring is the proper time to sow most garden seeds, and likewise it is the proper time to sow seed of most field crops. No sensible man would think of planting corn, for example, except in the spring after the warm weather arrives, but on the other hand no sensible man would think of sowing winter wheat at any other time than in the fall. The fallacy in the argument of the advocates of spring seeding lies in regarding the northern turf grasses as similar in their temperature and length-of-day relations to corn, spring wheat, and oats. As a matter of fact they are more nearly comparable in these relations to winter wheat and timothy. These turf grasses stool and root best under conditions such as exist during the fall and very early spring. This is doubtless due to the fact that lower temperature obtains then than during the late spring and summer, and the days are relatively shorter. Which factor of the environment—the cool weather or the short day—is the more responsible for this habit of growth of the turf grasses, is not known. Until recently it was supposed that temperature was the only important factor involved, but it has been proved beyond doubt that the relatively short days of fall exert a decided influence.

The seedlings that result when seeds of bents, fescues, redtop, or Kentucky bluegrass are sown in September soon produce new shoots from their lower nodes or joints. This is called "stooling." At the base of each plant there are several nodes or joints grouped closely together. While the weather is cool and the days are short there is no tendency for the stems upon which the nodes occur to elongate, as is done in summer when the culm is formed and the plant goes to seed, but new shoots continue to grow, thus making a close turf. The exact manner in which the turf is produced differs somewhat with the species. In addition to abundant stooling, a substantial development of roots takes place while the weather of fall is still favorable for growth.

When the seed of the northern turf grasses is sown in the spring, especially south of the latitude of New York, the rapid approach of warm

weather and the advent of the longer days provide conditions that are conducive to the elongation of the stems. This elongation, under normal conditions of growth, ultimately tends to result in the formation of culm and seed-head. Mowing, of course, prevents seed production; but the plants incline to spindle rather than to stool. Therefore, seedling plants from seed sown in the spring fail to form the close, vigorous turf that is produced from fall sowing, and they are less able to hold their own against crab-grass and other summer weeds and the many vicissitudes incident to the hot summer months. Even grass seedlings that get a poor start in the fall and appear to have made little or no growth, when spring arrives, have a great advantage over spring seedlings, though the latter come from early spring sowing.

The recommendation has been made by some that the seeding of certain of our northern turf grasses (particular kinds not specified), should be delayed until that time of spring when the weather and the soil have warmed up well. A study of the behavior of these grasses will soon convince the intelligent observer of the fallacy of this recommendation. If spring seeding must be done, then in the name of common sense do it as early as possible and not wait for corn-planting days to arrive. Green committees are urged to adjust their making and maintenance programs so that the sowing of seed, whether it is for the making of new greens or fairways or the reseeding of old ones, will be done some time during or near the early part of September. If greens or fairways must be seeded in the spring, do it early, and make the soil conditions as nearly ideal as possible. Having done these things, pray for a good season. The young grass plants will need all the help they can get.

A full-sized chapter might be written on the other phases of prevention of waste in seeding and reseeding greens and fairways. Certainly in a great majority of cases the rate of sowing is excessive. Much seed is positively wasted in this way. But the waste that comes from the willy-nilly practice of sowing seed on old turf is the least defensible of all. There may be conditions under which the reseeding of greens is a desirable thing to do, but it should be done with wisdom and understanding, which means, in the fall with a good compost dressing. Some day a wise green committee chairman will actually "count the teeth of the horse"; that is, he will properly check up the effects of reseeding and will learn by this incontrovertible method how much of the benefit, if he is fortunate enough to secure benefit, is due to the seed and how much to the compost and treatment that accompany reseeding. The golf clubs of America will erect a monument to his memory.

Courtesy of the game.—Every green committee should pound away at the members on the observance of the courtesies of the game. Members are naturally selfish or careless. Constant reminders by notices posted on bulletin boards or put in lockers or on caddy bags may make a convert now and then. A sharp reprimand to persistent offenders is good for the whole membership.

Whiskers on the bunkers.—Let the whiskers grow on the backs of bunkers. A bunker isn't a bunker until it grows whiskers. Some golf architects suggest clumps of rough grass in large bunkers.