

Ryegrass Is Better Than No Grass

First aid for collars, traffic areas, and eyesores.

by STANLEY J. ZONTEK

ON MOST GOLF COURSES, I suspect there exists an area of bare soil or thin turf that is best described as an *eyesore*. You know the spot. That area of bare ground where sand accumulates on the collar, near a bunker, and no matter how much you hand water it or how many times you resod it, it still dies each year.

Time or budget never seems to be available to thoroughly renovate the area, redo the bunker, strip the sod, remove the zone of sand accumulation, and add fresh soil, thereby solving the problem.

Other candidates for renovation include areas where golfers walk on and off the green, always in the same spot, wearing out the grass. No matter what you try to do in terms of traffic control — signs, ropes, etc. — problem areas of this type are common on most golf courses. You may even dream about trying barbed wire. What other choices do we have?

Also, one of the newer problems we now see on golf courses is the decline of bentgrass collars on some new greens. Any number of explanations exist as to why these collar areas become thin and die. Probably no one single cause exists. However, the fact remains that on some new greens, especially in the Transition Zone region, the grass on some collars, for whatever reason, dies in the summer. This creates a problem much greater than an eyesore. It can be a huge public relations problem. Why is the grass on the new green, cut at a much lower mowing height, thriving while the collar area, cut at a higher mowing height (which should be better for the grass), is thinning and dying? Until such time as the experts can sort out the problem, the golf course superintendent still must grow grass in any and all of these problem areas. What to do?

Sometimes golf course superintendents need a grass that functions as a *Band-Aid*. This is the essence of my turf tip. Perennial ryegrass can serve as



Nice perennial ryegrass collar in the Transition Zone.

a short-term to intermediate-term *fix*, even in situations where this grass is not normally considered for use. That's right. Perennial ryegrass can be that grass.

The most-often-asked questions about using perennial rye on collars or areas adjacent to the putting green include:

1. How about disease control? Won't the ryegrass become more diseased than the grass on the greens, especially during the hot, humid summer in the Transition Zone?

While ryegrass is susceptible to many diseases, most collar areas are sprayed along with the greens. As long as a reasonably comprehensive fungicide spray program is followed for the greens, including the ryegrass collars, disease problems with the collars have not been a huge problem.

2. How long will the ryegrass persist under these conditions?

Today's new generation of perennial ryes are remarkably persistent when growing at traditional collar mowing heights. Some ryegrass collars persist and perform well for years. To maintain good density, overseeding in the fall is a good idea.

3. How can the ryegrass be removed?

Chemically, products like chlor-sulfuron (Telar or Lesco's TFC) can

selectively remove perennial ryegrass from creeping bentgrass. Spot treatments with bentazone (Basagran) also chemically stress the ryegrass. Over time, gradual thinning of the ryegrass occurs, which allows the creeping bentgrass to gradually transition back into these areas. Finally, renovation and resodding is always an option.

4. Are there any other reasons for using perennial ryegrass in these collar areas?

Yes. For one, perennial ryegrass is recognized as being a tough, wear-resistant grass. On high-traffic areas, it just may be the best grass to use.

Perennial ryegrass collar areas can also serve as a buffer strip, in the northern half of the Transition Zone, between bentgrass greens and bermudagrass in the banks and approaches surrounding putting greens. Perennial rye is tolerant of a number of different products like ethofumesate (Prograss) and/or fenoxaprop-ethyl (Acclaim), which can help manage and control bermudagrass encroachment into greens. This is not a perfect solution to the problem, but it can provide the golf course superintendent with another option in the battle against bermudagrass encroachment into bentgrass greens.

5. How about the difference in color, texture, and playability between ryegrass and bentgrass? Will the golfers detect the difference?

Yes, there is a difference, but golfers probably will detect the difference between dead grass and bare soil more quickly and with greater passion than they will detect the difference between ryegrass and bentgrass. That's the point of this turf tip from superintendents of the Transition Zone. Ryegrass is better than no grass.

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