What Does Your Future Hold?

This tool will help you make an educated guess.

BY JAMES FRANCIS MOORE

Superintendents have to do a lot of guessing. What is the weather going to be like tomorrow (or even this afternoon)? Who is going to show up for work today, and who is going to call in sick at the very last minute prior to that shotgun start? How many tournaments is the golf professional going to arrange before he/she decides to check the calendar for the aerification dates? And every year, many superintendents throughout the country have to make one of the most unsettling "guesses" of all — how well has my turf survived the winter?

What the superintendent needs is a crystal ball — a tool to peek into the future — at least when it comes to determining how well the turf will come out of winter. A new trend in southern putting green maintenance is accentuating the need for such a tool. A rapidly growing number of bermudagrass courses are choosing to abandon the winter overseeding of putting greens. This is particularly true at courses that have converted to the new ultradwarf bermudagrass varieties. Not only do these new grasses have a shorter dormancy period, but they also offer extraordinary putting quality throughout the winter months — even while dormant. On these courses, green color is achieved with a light application of indicator dye rather than the sowing of bentgrass, ryegrass, or *Poa trivialis*. It is less expensive, eliminates the loss of putting quality that occurs during overseeding establishment and transition, and eliminates spring competition between the bermudagrass and the overseeded grasses. The only real drawback is that the superintendent spends all winter worrying whether or not the bermudagrass is going to "wake up" in the spring.

Back in 1994, a turf tip was offered that utilized a soda pop bottle to create a small biosphere. A cup cutter plug could be placed into the biosphere and the turf grown out to help in disease identification. Unfortunately, soda pop bottles have been redesigned in a manner that eliminates this useful alternative function. Necessity being the well-recognized mother of invention, an even better option is now offered. For less than $3, a miniature greenhouse can be purchased from Wal-Mart. Three pieces make up the unit. There is a tray to hold water, a second tray into which the plugs are placed, and a clear plastic cover to create the greenhouse effect. Although designed for starting plants from seeds, the unit is perfect for growing out plugs removed with a standard soil probe.

There are 12 sections in the tray with six spaces for plugs in each section. Collect plugs from the green from the back left, back right, middle left, middle right, front left, and front right. These plugs can be similarly oriented in the tray to help keep track of where they were collected. By collecting and growing out plugs removed from dormant putting greens, the superintendent can better predict the health of the turf, and whether or not the remainder of the winter should be used to update the resume.

The miniature greenhouse creates a warm, humid environment that is perfect for promoting disease activity,

Constructing a mini-greenhouse provides a useful tool for golf course superintendents to assess how well the turf may come out of the winter, identifying diseases, and observing various biotypes present on an older green.

and so it can be helpful in disease identification. Also, by allowing the turf to grow longer, one can better observe the various biotypes of grasses present in older greens. And last, but not least, it can be used for the very function for which it was designed — seed germination. Closely examine a sample of seed removed from a bag. Look for different types of seeds and place them into the tray. After a few days, you might find there is more in the bag than you thought.

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