

# Is Overseeding of Greens Becoming a “Dinosaur Practice”

I know! Overseeding greens is out of fashion right now for a lot of reasons, e.g., cost of seed, agronomic inconvenience, disruption to playability, non-overseeding trend on Ultradwarfs, concerns over spring transition problems, etc. But there are some golf courses that still believe in it strongly. Most of these golf courses are on the coast, but some are deep into the heart of the Carolinas. So, let's talk about what makes overseeding work successfully.

It starts with what kind of grass you are overseeding: Paspalum or Ultradwarf Bermuda. If you have Zoysia, in my opinion, it does not qualify as a grass that should ever be overseeded. It grows too slowly to transition back to a mono stand after overseeding. Zoysia's main purpose as a putting surface grass is its ability to grow in the shade where tree remediation is a challenge. If you overseed Zoysia, it will most likely be a death sentence for the grass.

Paspalum is on a select number of golf courses that have water quality issues. This has led to the use of salt tolerant Bent grasses for overseeding of these courses, e.g., Crystal Blue Turf

Links, Pure Select, Pure Distinction, Seaside II, etc. These Bent cultivars on Paspalum appear to be much better choices than Poa triv since Rapid Blight is an issue where high salts constituents are present. Plus, the Bent transitions well with little to no problem on Paspalum. The Bent fills in the cavities and creates a nice smooth surface as it matures. Based on my experience, 2 lbs. of seed per 1000 square feet is a good starting point as an application rate in early fall. Just put the seed out and let it fall through the canopy. Water, fertilize, and watch it grow. And another plus: you don't have to be as paranoid about fertilizer burn as you would with Poa triv plants since these Bents are salt tolerant. Some superintendents are mixing two cultivars together. For example, you might put out 1 lb. of Crystal Blue with 1 lb. of Pure Select per 1000 square feet. This is a rather simple application and provides zero interference with playability. Seems too easy!!! The key to success is having a good Paspalum canopy that will protect the seed while it is germinating and maturing. The canopy will cushion the Bent from wear and tear. Once in place, fertilize the Bent throughout the winter to help it establish. When spring rolls around, consider using Anuew (prohexadione calcium). It has displayed some excellent results in regulating both grasses with good success in the spring. I am not saying

other PGRs are not good. I am saying that based on my experience, Aneuw on Bent/ Paspalum seems to be a very good fit with no phytotoxicity or problems. Then mow the greens as low as you comfortably can with grooved rollers to encourage a good transition in the spring in conjunction with vertical mowing and topdressing to maintain smoothness on your putting surface. As it gets hot, the Bent will most likely become stressed from the heat and the Paspalum will completely takeover as a mono stand at some point. If you need to spray a light rate of Kerb in the summer to remove some of the Bent that is trying to hang on over the summer, that is a consideration. But do your homework first.



Above is a picture of a Bent/ Paspalum green mowed at .080 in the spring with grooved rollers about 10.

As for the Ultradwarfs (Bermuda), they have put a real dent in using Poa triv for overseeding. The dense growth habit of the Ultradwarfs has allowed them to perform well in a most cases without overseeding. However, there are still a few superintendents that believe strongly in using Poa triv cultivars on their Ultradwarf greens to give them more control during the winter and spring months. The thought is that overseeding may help with unexpected weather conditions or wear and tear that could thin out the canopy of a non-overseeded surface. So, let's revisit overseeding on Ultradwarfs and see how one might make it a successful.

The first thing one should consider is a 3-way blend of Poa triv that fits one's needs. For example, one cultivar may be more disease tolerant, the other cultivar may be more heat tolerant, and the other may provide better color. Each Poa triv cultivar brings a special trait to the table. By diversifying your cultivars, you are giving yourself a better chance of success. So, design a cultivar blend that best fits your situation. This may include: Saber, Cypress and Laser as an example.

Next, is the application rate. I personally like 12 lbs. per 1000 square feet of a 3-way blend. I have heard some superintendents say they want to go with lighter rates to help them with transition in the spring. But if one overseeds with lighter rates, the plants will tiller and become larger in size in the spring when fertilizing them. This will create unevenness and bumpiness on the putting surface. No one wants a renegade looking grass! When this happens, it becomes a very difficult task to smooth out the surface by grooming or brushing these fat plants down to size. The ideal is to have small juvenile plants that are growing in the canopy that are not oversized and too mature. Think of *Poa triv* as a grass that fills the voids of the Bermuda to protect against wear and tear and enhances ball roll. The 12 lb. rate complements this strategy.

Now that you have selected the appropriate blend, let's clarify that 12 lbs. is not really 12 lbs. When one thinks about overseeding rates, one needs to look carefully at the bag tag. It gives you a percentage of viable seed which is usually in the upper 80 % range. So, if you have a 50 lb. bag that says 88 % germ rate, you have lost 12 % right off the bat per lb. based on the amount of viable seed in that bag. That means you are now down to 10.8 lbs. Then figure in mortality rates. You are at best

10 lbs. per 1000 square feet or less. So don't cut the rate. It is already cut for you.

Now that your seed criteria is in place, it is time to prepare the surface for overseeding. To me, the best method is rather simple, but requires correct timing. As an example, if you are mowing your greens at .130 on October 1<sup>st</sup>, drop the height down to .100 all at once. Mow them for a couple of days at this height. Then raise the height to .150 with solid rollers. Prior to dropping the height, you should be off of PGRs for about 10 days so the canopy will leaf out. Apply enough fertilizer to force the Ultradwarf to grow to .150 after the drop. As this growth takes place, the canopy will open up so the seed can fall down through it. While this is happening, spray a curative rate of a non-phytotoxic fungicide. Then put your seed out with a rotary or drop spreader. Of course, if a rotary is used, a drop spreader should be used on clean ups unless you are overseeding around your green with rye. Then you can just feather the Poa triv seed into the rye. If there is a lot of wind, go with the drop spreader and a cleanup pass in the collar area. Going over the greens in 3 directions is the best approach to prevent skips. Once the seed is in place, delay mowing for a few days if possible to give the seed a chance to stabilize in the canopy. This prevents it from

tracking as mowing commences. As the seed germinates in the canopy, it is also being protected from traffic.

**Do not topdress until spring! It is a too abrasive for the Poa triv to handle when it is trying to establish. It will cut into the roots and damage the plant.**

It usually takes about 10 days or so on average for the seed to germinate. Continue mowing at the higher height for several weeks after seeding as the Poa triv develops its crown. Then apply a starter fertilizer as the weather begins to cool. After this, start lowering the height of cut to a comfort zone that fits the Poa triv / Ultradwarf and enhances surface structure and playability. Continue to fertilize and water as needed -- but don't over do it. Throughout the winter, do not let the Poa triv dry out; when you dry out the Poa triv, you are also drying out your Ultradwarf. This may result in desiccation of both grasses.

Also, applying light rates of trinexapac in the fall is an appropriate measure after the seed has germinated along with products that contain indole - 3 butyric acid as an option. This may enhance rooting.

In the spring, one might consider using Aneuw (prohexadione calcium) to regulate putting surface growth to help with transition and ball roll. This is all feel and timeliness.

And don't forget to drop the height in late winter to early spring. This lower cut may help prevent the Poa triv from shading out the Bermuda. This is a must!!

In addition to lowering the height, using grooved rollers on your mowers will give you a better cut than solid rollers. The idea behind using grooved rollers is to facilitate a more upright growth habit of the Poa triv and allow more sunlight to get to your Ultradwarf as warm weather approaches. Then switch back to solids rollers in the summer.

In conjunction with mowing, fertilizing both grasses equally is a prerequisite to success. This is critical! Remember, if you starve the Poa triv to make your greens roll quick in the spring, you are starving the Ultradwarf too. This may lead to transition problems down the road. So feed both grasses appropriately. Then the Ultradwarf will gradually over-take the Poa triv and you will have a great spring with good putting surface and beautiful greens as the weather changes.

On a personal note, overseeding may also help protect your Bermuda from "Old Man Winter" when temperatures drop below freezing. This has not been proven. Just food for thought!!!

Do your research and I hope your overseeding turns out great.



Overseeded Ultradwarf with *Poa triv*

