

Column: A Read on Greens

Headline: Kerbing Poa Annua's  
Persistent Presence

Author: George Frye

Is there anyone that likes Poa annua? Well, there some on that list like Pebble Beach, Cypress Point, Oakmont and Pine Valley, etc. What other grass scores this many top golf courses? Can we say this is the most loved and, at the same time, hated grass in America?

A few years ago, I played Oakmont Country Club. Best greens I have ever played. I was afraid to hit the ball uphill in fear of having a down-hill putt. Yes! Truly. Poa annua (annual bluegrass) is a loved grass by many courses. However, it can show up at courses where it is not wanted.

I remember taking a walking tour with Eddie Adams, head greenkeeper at The Old Course at St. Andrews, back in the '90s. I asked Eddie why they dried out the courses so much for The Open Championships.

He said: "We do that all the time to keep the Poa annua under control. The fescue can take the stress of no water due to its drought tolerance, but the Poa can't. So, keeping our courses on the dry side is critical. If we do not maintain dry conditions, we will lose control over the Poa.

"Once you lose control of Poa, it is tough to get rid of it. As one can see, given the right environment and right conditions, Poa can do very well most anywhere - even when it is not wanted. Then, under certain situations, it can become one bad-ass nightmare of a weed."

Well, the same goes for Poa on golf courses in the Carolinas. There are golf courses in the mountains that manage Poa as their primary grass, and it performs quite well. However, this grass can become an ugly problem for courses when it is not wanted. Just like in Scotland, given the right conditions or the right environment, this grass as a weed can become a real pain.

With that in mind, Poa in the Carolinas has a well-established reputation. Even since the days of Dr. Landon Miller, professor and researcher at Clemson University, this pesky weed of a grass has been an issue on most golf courses. I bring up Dr. Miller's name because he did more research on dealing with Poa annua as a weed than any person I know.

While Dr. Miller is no longer with us today, he would be proud of the fact that his favorite herbicide, Kerb, for Poa annua control is now taking front and center stage again 40 years later. It was Dr. Miller who poured his heart and soul into researching how to best use Kerb to control Poa annua on overseeded bermudagrass greens as well as fairways, as a pre-emergent and post-emergent.

In the early to late '80s, bermudagrass greens (Tifdwarf and Tifgreen 328) were all overseeded with perennial rye. Kerb became the product of choice as a pre-emergent herbicide to prevent Poa annua from coming up through the overseeded rye. The timing and rates were all too critical,

and Dr. Miller established some important protocols on how to best use Kerb and what results to expect. Back then, the rates on Kerb were .5 to .75 lbs of active per acre 40 to 50 days out respectively from overseeding on greens. The product worked great.

However, Kerb lost its luster when overseeding with *Poa trivialis* replaced perennial rye as an overseeding choice for greens around 1990. Kerb could no longer be used as a pre-emergent since it would prevent *Poa triv* from coming up as well as *Poa annua*. So, Kerb pretty much went away as a pre-emergent for *Poa annua* on bermudagrass greens.

Rubigan took its place for many years. It not only acted as a pre-emergent for *Poa annua*, but also as a great spring dead spot control product. However, Rubigan was taken off the market in 2012. Since ultradwarfs had pretty much replaced Tifdwarf and 328 by this time, overseeding had started to become a less attractive option for many clubs. The ultradwarfs were far more conducive to not overseeding than their distant cousins Tifdwarf and 328, which had to be overseeded because of their radically different growth habit, which was more rhizomatous.

The ultradwarfs, by contrast, were mostly stoloniferous. This stoloniferous growth was a great surface to putt on not only during the summer, but also during the winter when they were dormant or semi-dormant due to their mat-like canopy.

But the *Poa annua* was still an issue. As a result of losing Rubigan, Revolver took its place as the product of choice to control *Poa*. Initially, it was great. But as time and treatments have evolved, our not-so beloved grass, *Poa annua*, has started to build a tolerance to it. Revolver has started to lose its efficacy.

*Poa Annua* has started to turn its back on the Revolver. In fact, certain *Poa annua* cultivars and strains are just laughing at Revolver. Even the high rates are not fazing it.

As a result of all that, we have started to come full circle back to Dr. Miller's favorite herbicide for *Poa annua* control from the '80s, Kerb! For non-overseeded ultradwarf greens this product works great on *Poa annua*. However, it should be used with much respect and caution. It can get you in trouble quickly if the timing and applications rate are not well thought out.

Kerb is very mobile. I have seen it move 100 feet before. When it is applied, it needs to be watered in immediately. It is sensitive to photo degradation. So, getting it watered-in is critical.

There are a couple of ways to apply Kerb that have been used by superintendents on non-overseeded bermudagrass greens: My first choice would be to spread the rates out starting in the fall at .25 lbs. of ai. or 10 ounces per acre every 30 days for three months. This is a very safe approach. The next would be to go out at .5 lbs. ai. or 20 ounces at one time in the fall followed up 45 to 60 days later with another .25 lbs. ai. or 10 ounces per acre. This is one herbicide that *Poa* cannot stand.

If your fairways are overseeded, do not use Kerb on your greens. It may move into your rye and possibly kill it. I would suggest not using Kerb past mid-January. It may hurt your bermudagrass in the spring. If you have bentgrass or overseeded bermudagrass, do not use it in such a manner that it can wash onto your greens if used in the rough. This will not end well. Also, if your greens

are somewhat shaded in the fall, Kerb may cause some slight thinning, so adjust accordingly. But if your canopy is strong, you should be okay.

I hope this little bit of information on annual bluegrass and Kerb usage will help you this winter in dealing with this persistent grass. Good luck.

*\*Kiawah Island, SC-based George Frye has spent more than 30 years in and around golf course maintenance as a Ryder Cup-hosting superintendent and traveling consultant.*