

Options for overseeding bermudagrass sports fields

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Bermudagrass continues to be the most important turfgrass for sports fields in the southern and transition zone areas of the United States. With its rapid growth rate, good traffic tolerance, fast recuperative ability, good pest tolerance, and excellent quality, bermudagrass performs extremely well in both low- and high-maintenance sports facilities.

One of the only downsides to bermudagrass as a sports turf is that it experiences a long winter dormancy period, especially in the upper regions of its use. During the dormancy period, the turf is not aesthetically pleasing and is much more prone to wear injury during heavy use. For many years, sports field managers have used overseeding with a cool season grass as a means to provide an actively growing turf that is both attractive and can withstand traffic during this dormancy period. This has been especially popular at facilities where early spring sports such as baseball and soccer are being played.

One of the most important decisions in an overseeding program is the selection of an appropriate cool season grass for a specific application. Many grasses have been success-

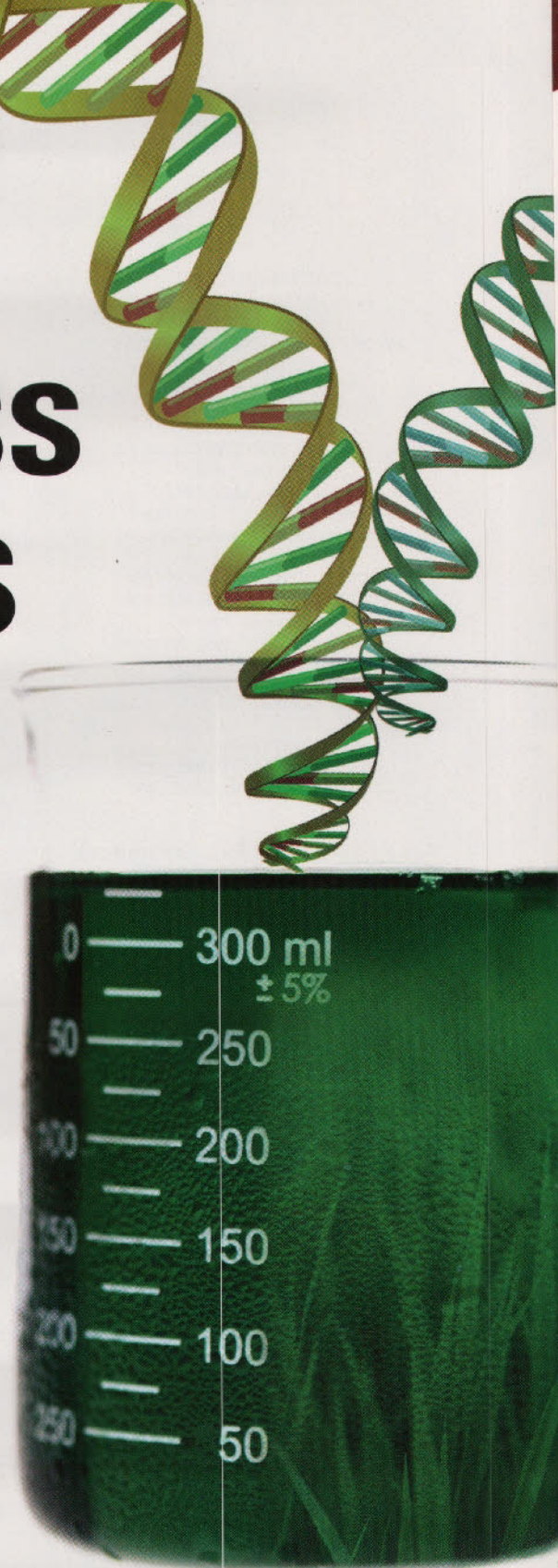
fully used for overseeding, including annual (Italian) ryegrass, perennial ryegrass, intermediate ryegrass, creeping bentgrass, rough bluegrass, and fine fescue. Most overseeding programs on sports fields have used either annual or perennial ryegrass, although some facilities have used the new hybrid, intermediate ryegrasses. Recently, turfgrass breeders have improved characteristics of both meadow fescue and tetraploid perennial ryegrass grasses, which have been used in forage systems around the world but have received minimal interest as turfgrasses. The following is a brief description of the major overseeding species, including their strengths and weaknesses for overseeding sports fields.

Annual ryegrass

Annual ryegrass was one of the first species used for overseeding because it germinates quickly (3-5 days), establishes rapidly under a range of conditions, and is relatively inexpensive to seed. Annual ryegrass can produce an acceptable overseeded turf and can be used in a range of sports field applications. However, compared to perennial ryegrass, annual ryegrass has poor shoot density, coarse leaf texture, and a light green genetic color and is less hardy

under extreme low and high temperatures. Because of its rapid growth rate, it also requires more frequent mowing than a good turf-type perennial ryegrass and this added cost should be considered if selecting annual ryegrass.

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Perennial ryegrass

Perennial ryegrass is the most widely used species for overseeding dormant bermudagrass sports fields. Perennial ryegrass produces a high-quality playing surface and is also has excellent establishment vigor and traffic tolerance. Turfgrass breeders have made significant improvements in color, texture, density, and mowing quality of perennial ryegrass over the past 40 years. However, increased heat tolerance, drought tolerance and disease resistance of improved perennial ryegrass cultivars have made it a persistent weed following overseeding because it does not always behave as an annual in southern climates. This persistence can be managed with the new sulfonylurea herbicides, but these herbicides add significant cost to an overseeding program. The persistence of perennial ryegrass has been the primary factor in the development of alternative overseeding species such as intermediate ryegrass.

Intermediate ryegrass

Intermediate ryegrass is a hybrid turfgrass species produced by crossing annual and perennial ryegrass. Several cultivars of intermediate ryegrass have appeared in the seed trade over the past 15 years and these varieties were primarily developed to offer improved transition characteristics. Although intermediate ryegrass does have better transition characteristics than perennial ryegrass, its quality is inferior and it also has a higher mowing requirement than perennial ryegrass. Similar to its parents, intermediate ryegrass possesses excellent germination and establishment vigor and is easy to establish in many overseeding situations.

Meadow fescue

Meadow fescue has not been widely tested as a turfgrass. Early trials in the United Kingdom suggested it has limited potential, producing a thin, open turf that competed poorly with weedy grasses such as annual bluegrass (*Poa annua*). In the mid-1990s, NexGen Research (Albany, OR) initiated a breeding program to examine the turf potential of meadow fescue in Europe and the United States. Several forage varieties and plant collections were screened in turf plots and seed production fields for desirable characteristics such as dark

color, fine leaf texture, and disease resistance. After several years of screening and backcrossing of desirable plants, an experimental cultivar (AMF 107) was developed for advanced testing. Based on previous work with this species in forage systems, it was speculated that meadow fescue may have potential for overseeding because of its poor heat tolerance and inability to survive in difficult environments.

Tetraploid ryegrass

All major turfgrass cultivars of perennial ryegrass are natural diploids, meaning they have two sets of chromosomes, one from the mother plant and one from the father plant. In forage breeding programs, techniques have been used to double the number of chromosomes and create a tetraploid line of perennial ryegrass with four chromosome sets. These tetraploid lines are generally more vigorous and have increased yield and improved forage quality. Because of their overly vigorous growth characteristics, tetraploid cultivars of perennial ryegrass have not been developed or tested in turfgrass systems. However, tetraploid perennial ryegrass has been noted as having poor heat and drought tolerance, characteristics that could make them useful in overseeding systems.

An experimental cultivar of a turf-type

tetraploid perennial ryegrass was developed by exposing elite, turf-type perennial ryegrass seeds to a chemical called colchicine. This chemical doubles the chromosome number and has been widely used by plant breeders to create plants with multiple chromosome sets. After chromosome doubling, several years of screening in turfgrass systems led to the development of an experimental line (T3) of tetraploid perennial ryegrass.

With the recent development of these alternative overseeding grasses, we have been interested in evaluating their performance in a range of overseeding situations, including applications to bermudagrass sports fields. The remainder of this article will highlight some of the studies we have conducted to date.

New overseeding species study

Five overseeding species were tested in the 2004-05 seasons at three locations, including the desert southwest (Maricopa, AZ), the southeast (Auburn, AL), and the transition zone (Fayetteville, AR). A full report from these trials was published earlier (*Crop Science* 47:83-90.). The entries included 'Integra' diploid perennial ryegrass, 'T3' tetraploid perennial ryegrass (Pennington Seed), 50% Transit and 50% Transeze intermediate ryegrasses (Pickseed), 'AMF 107' meadow fescue (NexGen Research),

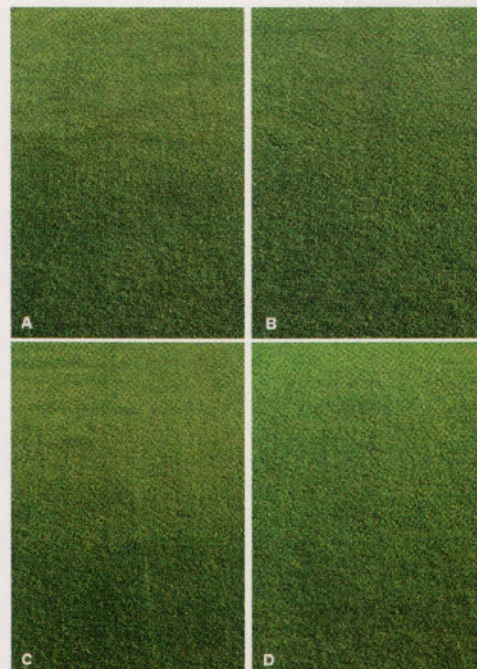


Photo 1: Integra diploid perennial ryegrass produced the highest turfgrass quality at all locations.



Photo 2: The tetraploid perennial ryegrass had the lowest survival of all species tested.

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and a nonseeded control. Seeding rates for the individual species were adjusted to deliver 16 pure live seeds (PLS)/square inch, which correlates to 460 lb./acre for diploid perennial ryegrass. Overseeding grasses were maintained under fairway/sports field conditions, with a mowing height of 0.75 inch. Each site adopted management practices that were typical in their region for overseeding turf, but all plots were fertilized with nitrogen at a rate of 1.0 pound nitrogen/1,000 square feet per month of active growth.

Establishment of overseeded grasses was measured as either seedling vigor (on a 1-9 scale, where 1 = no germination and 9 = full germination) at 14 days after planting or visual estimates of percent stand of the overseeded grass at six weeks after planting. Turfgrass quality (on a scale of 1-9, where 9 = optimal turfgrass quality) was visually assessed each month during the overseeding season (November-June) and data were averaged to yield a seasonal turfgrass quality score.

Transition from the overseeded cool season grass to the bermudagrass was visually rated every other week beginning with bermudagrass green-up in the unseeded control. Transition was recorded as a per-



centage of the bermudagrass in the plot. Transition to bermudagrass was not aided with chemical or cultural practices. At the Arkansas and Alabama site, a significant amount of the overseeded, cool season grass persisted through the summer and was evaluated in the plots the following winter.

Study results

All species tested in this trial germinated within seven days of planting at all locations, but the ryegrass entries generally had the greatest seedling vigor and establishment rates and were not different from each other. Seedling vigor and establishment rate for meadow fescue was slower than the ryegrasses, with germination occurring 2-3 days after the ryegrasses. At 6 weeks after planting, the meadow fescue generally had about 75% of the total stand observed with the ryegrasses. A sports field manager could expect the tetraploid ryegrass to establish as fast as other grasses currently used in overseeding programs, but the meadow fescue will be a little slower to establish than the ryegrasses.

The Integra diploid perennial ryegrass produced the highest turfgrass quality at all locations, but it was not statistically different from the intermediate or tetraploid perennial ryegrass at Alabama (Photo 1). The tetraploid perennial ryegrass also performed favorably and was equal or superior to all other overseeding species except the Integra diploid perennial ryegrass at Arkansas and Arizona.

Meadow fescue produced turfgrass quality similar to that of intermediate ryegrass and tetraploid perennial ryegrass in Arkansas, but it had lower turf quality scores in Alabama and Arizona. These results suggest that meadow fescue may have more potential as an overseeding grass in transition zone climates where cooler temperatures persist.

Transition

The transition of an overseeded perennial ryegrass back to bermudagrass can be very challenging and will often require a herbicide. In Arizona, the meadow fescue began to transition sooner than other species during the early and mid-transition period, and the Integra diploid perennial ryegrass was the slowest to transition at this site. The tetraploid perennial ryegrass was intermediate to other species at all rating dates and was similar to the intermediate ryegrass at the early and late transition dates. At the Arkansas site, intermediate ryegrass, tetraploid perennial ryegrass and meadow fescue all had better transition back to bermudagrass than Integra diploid perennial ryegrass. At the Alabama site, all species transitioned in a similar fashion.

A final component of transition is the persistence of the overseeding grass in the autumn following the summer transition period, which can lead to weed problems if overseeding is not continued the next season. At the Arkansas site, which is an upper transition zone location, significant survival was observed with all species. The tetraploid perennial ryegrass had the lowest survival of all species tested, indicating the most complete transition back to the bermudagrass (Photo 2).

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Photo 3: Traffic tolerance of the tetraploid ryegrass appears to be very similar to diploid ryegrasses.

Future outlook

The development of overseeding grasses with improved transition characteristics could have a significant effect on future overseeding management programs and could reduce the need to use herbicides to transition overseeded turf back to bermudagrass. These initial trials clearly demonstrate the potential of two new species, meadow fescue and tetraploid perennial ryegrass, for overseeding dormant bermudagrass turf. As these are the first experimental lines developed for this purpose, it is assumed that further advances can be made by breeders to enhance desirable characteristics in these species. At present, the most notable characteristics displayed by these species include good germination and seedling vigor, good turfgrass color and quality and improved transition characteristics compared to diploid perennial ryegrass.

New studies with these grasses are currently underway to determine specific management requirements for these species such as optimal seeding rates, fertility requirements, mowing requirements and pest management issues. Studies are also underway to investigate the use of chemical and non-chemical methods to

transition these grasses back to bermudagrass. In addition, these grasses are being exposed to traffic in many of these studies to determine how management practices affect their ability to perform under traffic. Preliminary results suggest that these grasses can be maintained under a range of mowing heights, from 0.25 inch up to 0.75 inch. In addition, traffic tolerance of the tetraploid ryegrass appears to be very similar to diploid ryegrasses (Photo 3), which suggest that this species can be used in those sports turf situations where perennial ryegrass has been traditionally used. Initial indications are that meadow fescue is less tolerant of traffic than the ryegrasses, especially at low heights of cut (< 0.5 inch).

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Mike Richardson (mricha@uark.edu) and Doug Karcher are professors and Ryan Rolfe and Josh Summerford are graduate students in the turfgrass management program at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville.

John Mascaro's Photo Quiz

Can you identify this sports turf problem?



Problem: Irregular brown arrow shaped area on field

Turfgrass Area: Multi-use park field

Location: Burlington, IA

Grass Variety: Mixture of cool season grasses

**Answer to
John Mascaro's Photo Quiz
on Page 51**

*John Mascaro is President
of Turf-Tec International*



Cool season turfgrass variety roundup

Here are some of the latest cool season turfgrasses currently available from suppliers nationwide:

Overseeding ryegrass

Breeder: Kenneth Hignight from Advanta Seeds Pacific has bred T3 (experimental designation: APR1802), a ryegrass that transitions easily and permanently, says Pennington Seed. T3 does not return the following year as most ryegrasses do and transitions naturally without the added expense of chemical applications. The dark green color and fine textured leaf offers turf managers just what is needed to plant early in the fall and transition gradually in the spring.

T3 does not tolerate the spring heat providing a chemical free transition; transitions completely not to return the following year; and has a natural dark green color to look

good when fertilizer levels run low.

Recommended for use in Climatic Zones 7, 8, 9, 10 (may not be adaptable to all areas within each climatic zone). Under ideal conditions, germination begins in 3-6 days. When overseeding, care must be taken to ensure adequate seed to soil contact. Subject to germination rate, first mowing may begin within 14 days after sowing. Recommended mowing heights range from 1/8 to 1 1/2 inch. T3 responds to 1/2 lb. Nitrogen per application. Repeat applications only as grass shows need due to fading color.

Suggested overseeding rate for athletic fields is 10-20 lbs./1000 sq. ft.

New gray leaf spot-resistant perennial ryegrasses

Gray Leaf Spot is a devastating disease caused by *Pyricularia grisea* that quickly attacks highly maintained turf areas containing older susceptible ryegrass varieties. The

disease was originally identified on perennial ryegrass in New England and the Mid-Atlantic States in the early 90's and its incidence has been spreading quickly across the country.

Available now, these three varieties – Secretariat, Exacta, and Charismatic – were developed in conjunction with Rutgers University. They all scored very high in the new NTEP data that was published by Rutgers this summer, with Exacta II GLSR the #1 ranked variety for Gray Leaf Spot Resistance.

They are available in the ultimate disease resistant 3-way ryegrass blend called Trifecta.

New perennial ryegrass and more

Buena Vista is a new release from Burlingham Seeds that it says has excellent gray leaf spot resistance. It was developed for enhanced salt tolerance from dry soil types. A beautiful dark green color and fine leaf texture enhance its turf performance, says Burlingham.





High endophyte levels add to drought and stress tolerance for sports turf.

A tall fescue called Turbo recently finished its 5-year NTEP study as a high performer. Turbo has high endophyte that enhances disease and drought tolerance; it is an all around excellent performer, top in California trials and on the Maryland/Virginia recommended list for tall fescue varieties.

Dynamo Kentucky bluegrass is a cross of Blacksbury and Unique Kentucky bluegrass varieties originally bred by Pure Seed Testing. Dynamo mixes well with other elite varieties. It has a strong sod knit and is a great fit in shorter cut sport fields, says Burlingham. Dynamo has a rich green color and has excellent powdery mildew resistance. Because of the mildew resistance, it has top-rated shade tolerance for a Kentucky bluegrass variety in most recent NTEP trials.

Firebird Tall Fescue is ranked as one of the darkest tall fescues in recent NTEP trials. Firebird is a top performer in many locations across the country in NTEP trials. It has medium high endophyte levels that help in drought tolerance, insect and other stresses in the transition zone.

SRO's latest cool season selections

Seed Research of Oregon's Leah Brilman supplied this information:

Spitfire Texas X Kentucky hybrid bluegrass is a progeny of a cross between the hybrid designated BDF X Midnight. It was selected for a very dark green color and superior germination and establishment compared to many other hybrid bluegrasses.

- Heat and drought tolerant
- Very dark green color
- Extensive rhizomes
- High wear tolerance

SR 8650 tall fescue was developed for dark color, fine leaf texture and the ability to form

rhizomes under mown turf conditions.

- Very high density
- Very dark green color
- Rhizome expression under mown turf conditions
- High brown patch resistance

Harrier perennial ryegrass has extremely high gray leaf spot resistance with very dark green color and high turf quality.

- Fine leaf texture
- High tillering
- Winter-active growth
- High stress resistance

SR 4600 perennial ryegrass was one of the highest rated for gray leaf spot resistance in the 2004 Perennial ryegrass NTEP in addition to having very high turf quality even where this disease is not a problem.

- Spreading type growth habit for better wear resistance
- Very dark green, high turf quality
- Winter-active growth
- High stress resistance

Penguin 2 perennial ryegrass was developed for superior rapid germination with salts in the soil or irrigation water combined with dark green color and superior turf quality.

- High seedling salt tolerance
- Dark green color
- High red thread resistance
- Superior performance for overseeding
- Winter-active growth

Zoom (LCK) perennial ryegrass has the highest overall turf quality in the 2004 NTEP trials combined with high gray leaf spot resistance.

- Excellent turf quality under all maintenance regimes
- Very high brown patch, red thread and Pythium resistance

- Very high gray leaf spot resistance
- Winter-active growth
- Dark green color

Calypso 3 perennial ryegrass was developed to have a very dark green color combined with early spring green-up and winter-active growth.

- Very dark green color
- Excellent pink snow mold resistance
- High red thread resistance
- Tolerant of a wide range of soil pH

New varieties from Barenbrug USA

The Kentucky bluegrass research program of Barenbrug USA has a unique characteristic: Every variety sold by Barenbrug must pass our wear simulation program. This program is not used by any other breeder in the U.S. and it assures that every variety produced by Barenbrug has excellent wear tolerance.

Baroness is a new variety performing very well in different locations across the U.S. It has outstanding drought tolerance; in fact, it tops the NTEP list for drought tolerance. Baroness also has very high turf quality and is very dark green. It is a small seeded variety, which means it has twice the seed as other bluegrasses. Barenbrug offers a new coating for this variety called Zeba, a non-toxic, biodegradable, starch-based, super-absorbent coating that forms a hydro-gel to provide moisture on demand to increase efficiency of germination and establishment.

The new variety from Barnique performs very well in NTEP trials. Barnique has excellent wear tolerance and is lighter green than Baroness. Barnique also has very small seeds and is available with Zeba coating.

Barimpala is one of the fastest establishing bluegrasses you can find on the market. Barimpala was originally bred in Europe and performs very well as a straight and in mix-

tures. It was one of the varieties used for the world championship soccer in Germany. Barimpala is high in wear tolerance, and is lighter colored than Baroness, which allows for better concealment of any poa annua you may have in your field. Barimpala is also a small seeded variety and available with Zeba.

TurfStar is the premium perennial ryegrass blend from Barenbrug. It contains high quality varieties, is guaranteed Poa annua free and has a high germination rate. This fall Barenbrug introduces TurfStarXPC, XPC stands for Xtra Poa Cover. This perennial ryegrass mix has lighter colored perennial ryegrass varieties in it, which are perfect for concealing any poa you may have on your field. It also contains Bargold, a revolutionary perennial ryegrass variety that was used for the World Cup soccer fields (2006) in Germany. Bargold is a fine leaved variety and has outstanding wear tolerance. It also withstands close mowings, as short as 1/5 of an inch, which is very uncommon for perennial rye.

This spring Barenbrug introduced SOS plus Panterra for overseeding bermudagrass. The SOS program allows the end user to create their own regional specific overseeding mixture based on their climate and desired transition speed. SOS was developed in conjunction with David Chalmers of Texas A&M University. It is based on Panterra, an annual ryegrass with great turf characteristics. SOS is a 2-step program, first you select your climate zone, and

then you select the transition speed you would like for spring. Based on these two criteria you are shown what your ideal mixture should be. In order to make the selection process simple Barenbrug developed an overseeding wheel to make this choice easier, go to www.barusa.com and click on the SOS link. With SOS you can have high quality grass with the transition speed you desire.

Zeba is a unique coating that absorbs and releases water as needed by the plants. It is a natural starch-based coating, biodegradable to USDA standards. Zeba is not based on petroleum, so there is no residue in the soil or high sodium contents.

When added to our bluegrass varieties it can hold 400 times its own weight in water. It will also take up vital nutrients that aid in establishment. Zeba ensures that during the germination and establishment process there is an environment around the seed that holds enough water and nutrients to let the plant germinate and establish. Zeba gives our bluegrasses the ability for improved germination and establishment with less water. While Zeba takes up water and nutrients, it will not absorb salt so your valuable plants are protected and look beautiful with less water. Barenbrug and the University of Illinois conducted a trial to see how our bluegrasses performed at half the seeding rate. We did that because some bluegrasses have very small

seeds, almost 2 million seeds per pound compared to the normal 1 million seeds per pound. The results of the trial were impressive; the turf quality of the small seeded varieties was excellent at half the rate.

Scotts' sports turf blend

Over the past 30 years, Scotts researchers have strived to develop a bluegrass, or blend of bluegrasses that can not only withstand the wear and tear of a sports field, but also tackle the issue of providing almost four seasons of color and growth in the transition zone, and other warmer regions of the US.

Bermudagrass fields provide an excellent playing surface in warmer regions, but in the early spring, when baseball is being played, Sports fields without overseeded ryegrass are being played on dormant turf. In the fall, when cooler temperatures arrive, football is being played on slower growing, or even dormant bermuda.

Now a blend of Heat Tolerant Bluegrasses provide the best turf option for both spring and fall, and yet perform even during the hottest months of the year. A blend containing the HT bluegrasses, Thermal Blue, Solar Green, Thermal Blue Blaze, Dura Blue or even SPF-30 will provide almost four seasons of outstanding turf. With aggressive rhizomes, they repair and establish extremely well, and reduce the need for overseeding with Perennial Ryegrass. ■

