



Q&A with Dr. Grady Miller

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Too late, winter hit

It is June and some of our fields are still not 100 percent out of dormancy. It seems we have winter damage everywhere. What now?

— North Carolina

For the January 2014 issue I answered a question about preventing winter damage. Despite everyone's best practices, we still had winter damage across the transition zone and parts of the southeast. Based on all the calls, pictures, and visits it is apparent that all the warm-season grass species grown in the transition zone were affected with some level of winter damage. For example, bermudagrass athletic fields had much less damage than centipedegrass lawns.

If there is some good news, it seems like the newer bermudagrass cultivars Latitude 36 and Northbridge came through Carolina's winter without problem. TifGrand, which never really touted itself as cold tolerant, was damaged in some locations and not others. Of course these new grasses are not planted so widespread that we can proclaim too much based on this year's experience.

of hundred yards away we had mature fine-textured zoysiagrasses that had appreciable damage.

So, before I get accused of being overly partial or critical to certain grasses, let me say what I often say to people trying to pick grasses—do not pick a grass based solely on one trait. So, while I noted that TifGrand and Princess 77 were not as cold tolerant as Latitude 36 and Riviera that does not make TifGrand and Princess 77 bad grasses and Latitude 36 and Riviera ideal grasses. Each has other attributes that should be considered before they are selected for a new planting.

Back a few years ago when we were experiencing record drought, homeowners would ask me what grass they could plant that is the most tolerant of drought. I would reply "bahiagrass." Before I could qualify my comment, some would interject that bahiagrass is coarse, lacks density, and has all those pesky seedheads. I would say, yes, but you only asked about drought tolerance.

Tifway is still the most commonly planted hybrid bermudagrass in the state, so naturally I saw more winter damage on Tifway than

into the damaged area or may only require sodding of the largest damaged area. The smaller damaged areas may just need extra time and fertilizer to adequately regrow. So, if the manager is only needing a limited amount of new turfgrass, I would suggest a manager to not to contaminate the field by introducing a new grass.

I have seen a few instances that the greatest winter damage was in the highest wear/compaction areas (e.g. between the hash marks on a football field and the sidelines). If a field manager wants to renovate those specific areas and introduce a new grass then that would be their decision. I could more likely convince myself to do that on the sidelines than within the field but some may elect to go with something new in the high wear areas.

Currently there is a sod availability issue in North Carolina. There is so little Tifway available that some people may have to take whatever then a can get or have sod shipped in from afar. Sod prices are sure to climb rather quickly this year due to supply and demand, so hopefully if one needed sod it was secured early.

With low supply of Tifway and other bermudagrasses, more people may need to take plugs from their own fields to renovate weak or dead areas within the same field or other fields on their property. This works great if you have time and labor to dig and plant all the needed plugs. This also minimizes the opportunity to contaminate a field with a different grass.

If someone is going to re-grass the entire field, then I would suggest they do their research to find out what grasses are available to them. There really are some nice new grasses that they may want to investigate further. May you all have a good summer for growing grass. ■

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As for popular seed cultivars, I saw Riviera and Yukon seeded bermudagrass survive undamaged on some northern fields whereas Princess 77 plantings had some green-up issues. And looking at our National Turfgrass Evaluation Program tests, the current seeded and vegetative bermudagrasses being tested greened up much later than normal but came back from our winter in Raleigh, NC without problem. Just a couple

anything else. Turf managers have asked if they should go back and re-plant Tifway. Each situation is a bit different, so it is tough to generalize. But my response has generally been that it is their decision, but my advice is that unless they need a total re-plant, I would not hesitate to renovate with Tifway.

What do I mean by a renovation? Well, winter damage is often sporadic so the field or turf area may only need time to regrow