The Fall Stage is Set

Weather

The first half of October gave us above average temperatures, and a nice sustained spike at the end of the September 15-October 15 cool season turf seeding season. Most have reported a very good take for turfgrass seed, and solid establishment. The I-70 corridor didn’t get as much rain as those in the southern portion, so supplemental irrigation every now and then may have been necessary, particularly if seeding was done in early October after the late September rains. Additionally, 74% of pastures were in fair to good condition across the state at the end of September, which is another indicator that the weather during our fall season was conducive for establishment.
The upcoming forecast, however, indicates the seeding window is now closed. If you’re hunting for a red October in Missouri, you won’t find it, as we are slated to be cold for the rest of the month. Drier air is also forecasted to be the norm through October, and cold dry seed doesn’t germinate. If seeding must be done in this period, covers will be necessary as well as irrigation. Tomorrow night and perhaps Thursday, there may even be a splash of frost throughout Missouri with nighttime lows slated for the lower 30’s. If this occurs, it would be the earliest frost in the last 6 years, although still later than the somewhat archaic average of October 15th (1971-2000) for the mid-Missouri region. Both zoysia and bermudagrass are going dormant now, and this cold spurt should put them to bed for good.
Quick Hits

- We heard several reports last week of large patch outbreaks on zoysia home lawns. This serves as no real surprise since we’ve seen large patch active at the turf farm for some time now (see above). At this time of year, the symptoms may not have the brilliant characteristic orange firing pattern to the patch margins as we see in the spring. Instead, infected turf just seems to go dormant faster than uninfected areas. At this late point of the year, I do not suggest fungicide treatment, because the most effective fungicides are systemic and the zoysiagrass plant is shutting down with the cooler temperatures. However, make note of the affected areas and make sure to apply a preventive fungicide in these areas at or just before spring green up next year.
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- Extended bermudagrass color by cultivar and fertilization. At the MU Turf Farm we are seeing significant differences in bermudagrass entering dormancy depending on cultivar and fertilization regime. We installed two small sod pieces of the newer cultivars ‘Latitude 36’ and ‘Northbridge’ into our larger ‘Patriot’ bermudagrass block and the color differences have been very conspicuous (see above). Similarly, we are conducting a small demonstration trial investigating fall fertilization effects on cold tolerance and disease expression in bermuda. Just a single late season nitrogen fertilizer kick can delay dormancy (see above).

- After all, fall will be fall. Leaves are dropping, leaving turf managers throughout the area collectively sighing with the prospects and practices of fall leaf removal. I personally have the above-pictured huge American sycamore perched above my house, which provides great shade during the summer heat. However, it pains me greatly when these thousands of hand-sized leaves start raining down and cover my driveway and Iwan. Removal is obviously necessary for golf and sports turf, but is leaf removal necessary for lawn health? From a disease standpoint, (particularly snow mold), leaving the dropped foliage on top of the turf is a no-no and an eyesore, but can the leaves simply be mulched in? Jim Quinn and Dr. Fresenburg wrote a great review article of research done at Michigan State covering this issue (click here to read). In my case, I’ll mulch in the oak and hickory leaves in the backyard as long as possible, and still pick up those big ole’ sycamores.
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Fall Football (both of them) are in the air.
A. On Oct. 11th, the incredible Sporting Park in KC hosted the U.S. World Cup Qualifier.
B. From this past Saturday. No caption necessary.

- What an October for Missouri sports! While we revel in this cornucopia of success for the Cards, Chiefs, Mizzou, Sporting KC, etc. etc., subtly remind your friends not involved in the turf industry about the beauty and functionality of the fields these athletes are playing on. Justin Bland, former Mizzou football player and grounds manager at Sporting Park, granted two “non-turfies” and myself the opportunity to visit the field prior to the United States World Cup Soccer Qualifier on Oct. 11. After we discussed management, my friends marveled at the inputs and behind the scenes effort that went into preparation of this incredible facility. So enjoy the drama of the World Series and these wonderful football Saturdays and Sundays, and celebrate the turf managers that have so expertly set the stage for them.

Lee Miller
Follow on Twitter! @muturfpath
Like on Facebook! Mizzou Turfgrass Extension Turfgrass Pathologist
University of Missouri