

HORT 310 Turfgrass Management

By Tracy Dougher



Catalog listing: Turfgrass propagation, fertilization, establishment, and maintenance. Recognition and adaptabilities of Northern and Southern turfgrasses used for landscape and sports use. Includes irrigation principles and basic hydraulics, establishment and fertilizer calculations, and pest management. Lab includes experimentation with establishment techniques, equipment calibration, soil testing, and turfgrass maintenance.

In the first few weeks of class, students are challenged to learn 15 grasses (of warm and cool season) commonly used as turfgrass. The additional layer of challenge in identification of turfgrasses is that the plants are never allowed to flower, thus removing a key characteristic from which to identify the grasses. For as many weeks as possible, the Turfgrass Teaching Plots housed at the Horticulture Farm becomes our hands-on classroom; observing the cool season turfgrasses in their native habitat and a couple of warm season grasses outside their native range; questioning and executing the techniques of soil and site preparation, sodding, and seeding; determining the maintenance required; and discovering the latest and greatest in native grass research for turfgrass applications. Students tromp over the grassy knolls of two comparative but distinct turfgrass business, a golf course and a sod production farm, often opening the eyes of students to the vast industry that supports what appears to be a mundane plant.

As we ramble through the (un)usual science of growing grasses, students are challenged to grow and maintain two turfgrass plots under opposing conditions, such as high and low light conditions, and record and analyze the differences in mowing, fertilizer applications, and water use. The projects are graded on aesthetics, as that is the major goal of most turfgrass products, as well as the accuracy of their records and calculations. As with real-life, these turfgrass plots are invaded by pests (pictures of pests so as to not destroy the integrity of the greenhouse) and the students must respond to the pests in a timely fashion before the pest figuratively destroys their plots. In this environment, students explore the world of turfgrass extension and the vast network of turfgrass pest identification and diagnosis specialists.

In the final analysis, students often comment on their surprise at the intricacies and vastness of knowledge required for what at first glance appears to be the backdrop of our lives.