

Recent Advances in Disease Resistance of Seashore Paspalum

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Seashore paspalum appears to be the latest rage in golf grasses and is considered by most in the industry as THE new turf grass. Of course the species, *Paspalum vaginatum*, has been around for centuries, but it is only recently that this new turf grass has become popular for use on golf courses and other recreational sites, especially where salt is an issue.

Seashore paspalum is a warm-season, prostrate, perennial turf grass that is best adapted to coastal environments between 30° and 35° N and S latitudes. This grass spreads by stolons and rhizomes and ranges in leaf texture from fine to coarse. Seashore paspalum is the most salt tolerant warm season turf grass currently available and tolerates many stresses common to coastal environments including irrigation with brackish and non-potable water, saline soils, drought, a wide range of soil pH, infertile soils, and water logging. This grass could also be used for forage and for reclamation and stabilization of sandy and salt affected soils.

The first seashore paspalum breeding program was initiated in 1993 at the University of Georgia Griffin Campus with core funding from the U.S. Golf Association. This program is now recognized as a major contributor to the recent success of seashore paspalum as a turfgrass species. Thus far, the UGA program has focused on development of cultivars suitable of use by the golf course industry and has released three cultivars. Dr. Duncan released two cultivars before his retirement in 2003. 'SeaIsle 1' and 'SeaIsle 2000' were developed as companion grasses with SeaIsle 1 for use on fairways and tees, and SeaIsle 2000 for use on greens. The most recent UGA release, 'SeaIsle Supreme', was released to licensed sod producers in 2005 and is touted as a cultivar suitable for course-wide use. Turf-Seeds of Oregon in collaboration with UGA has developed the first seeded seashore paspalum, 'SeaSpray', which became commercially available in 2005.

As these and other cultivars have become increasingly accepted and used by the turf industry, reports of disease problems have begun to cause concern. Currently, little is known about the diseases of this new turf grass or what levels of disease resistance exist within the released cultivars. Dollarspot is a common turf pathogen that can attack seashore paspalum especially when fertility is low. Dr. Lee Burpee, turf pathologist, has been working closely with the breeding program to document dollars spot resistance levels in the currently available cultivars and to identify new sources of resistance. Great progress has been made in the past year in identifying high levels of dollar spot resistance in several experimental lines under development.

These new sources of resistance will be utilized by the breeding program we continue to focus on developing new vegetative and seeded cultivars of this exciting new turf grass.