

TO SEED OR NOT TO SEED, THAT IS THE QUESTION

Many communities are facing this question on whether to over seed their turf with rye seed this winter. The cost of seed has doubled in price from 2020 due to various environmental factors such as drought and fires in Oregon this past year. Most of the seed available to the public is grown in Oregon and it is a commodity just like what was depicted in the movie Trading Places with Eddie Murphy and Dan Aykroyd. What is the right thing to do?

Budgets for 2021 were set in mid to late 2020 for the 2021 year before a lot of the issues we are now facing came into play. Many homeowner associations cannot afford the increases and are going to have to make difficult decisions moving forward on turf management. Do we bite the bullet and find the money, or do we change our thought process and reduce the amount of square footage we overseed or eliminate seeding for 2021 completely? All these questions should be on the table for debate this year and here's why.

WATER SAVINGS

Arizona has been in various stages of drought for the past twenty years. Lake Mead is at its' lowest levels since the dam was constructed in the 1930's and the Colorado River is not feeding as much water to our reservoirs due to less snowfall in the Rockies. Most of our replenishment water to the Colorado River comes from the melting of snow and will require many years of ample snowpack to build the water back to sustainable levels. If communities choose not to over seed, the savings in water can be up to 500,000 gallons per acre over the months of October, November, December, January, February and March. Water costs in Arizona will never get cheaper and various stages of cutbacks in our usage will be in effect shortly. Water is our most precious commodity in the desert, and we will need to be more conscious of how and where we use it to feed our landscapes. Grass areas require three times as much water to thrive as plants and trees over the course of a year and the quickest way to gain control of water usage is to identify turf areas that aren't functioning as originally designed. Narrow strips of grass, turf basins with extreme slopes and oddly shaped turf areas that are difficult to water efficiently are a couple of examples of where to start if thinking of reducing grass square footage.

DESIGN INTENT CHANGES AS COMMUNITIES GROW AND MATURE

Original landscape designs in communities are intended to sell lots and homes as quickly as possible. Many designs in Arizona are marketed to people coming from northern states, Canada and the east coast of the United States. Why? People are flocking to the southwest to escape harsh winters and enjoy the outdoors 365 days a year. It is a natural tendency to look at communities that may remind you of your home state with lush landscapes and plenty of green grass when choosing a community to live in. As communities grow and mature, landscapes often need a refresh to keep up with the times and competition of neighboring developments. Many of the communities built in the 1960's, 1970's and 1980's in Arizona wouldn't be approved today due to stronger regulations on available land, water usage and infrastructure feasibility. In order to stay viable in the coming decades, many communities are undertaking a dramatic change to their landscapes by reducing turf quantities, utilizing desert adapted plant material and upgrading irrigation systems to gain efficiency in how they irrigate their landscape. The communities that will stand the test of time are the ones who realize change is inevitable and embrace it by thoughtful discussions and education of their residents through an

understanding of how to adapt and change in our desert environment that will allow enough water for future generations to enjoy what we currently call home.