

## Fred V. Grau (1902-1990)

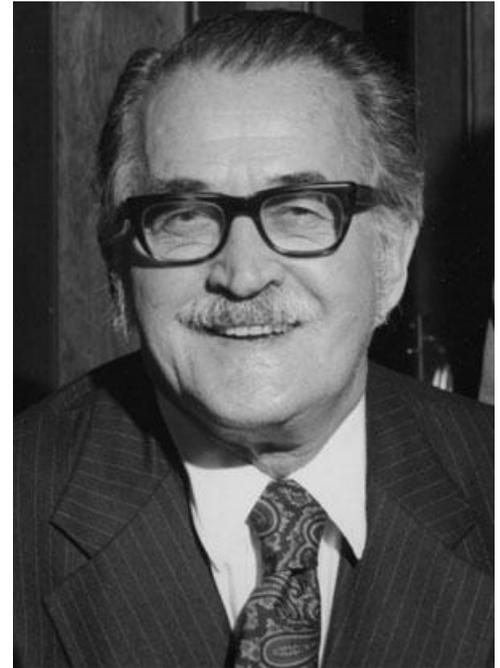
Fred Grau was born in Bennington, Nebraska, in 1902. After receiving his B.S. degree from the University of Nebraska in Spring 1931, Grau worked with USDA staff at the [Arlington Turf Gardens](#) in Washington, DC.<sup>1</sup> He earned his master's and doctorate in agronomy from the University of Maryland, graduating in 1935.<sup>2</sup> Grau then accepted a position as the nation's first extension service turf agronomist at Pennsylvania State College (now Pennsylvania State University) in State College.<sup>3</sup> In 1945 he returned to the Washington, DC, area, becoming director of the [USGA Green Section](#) and a United States Department of Agriculture scientist at the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center in Beltsville, Maryland.<sup>4</sup>

Grau was an early turfgrass innovator, making several significant contributions to the turf industry. He came up with the idea for a vertical mower, or verticut machine, while trying to remove grassy weeds from his College Park, MD, lawn. Vertical mowing is now a standard turf maintenance practice.<sup>5</sup>

Grau evaluated a Kentucky bluegrass selection that had been found thriving at the Merion Golf Club in Ardmore, Pennsylvania. He tested this new bluegrass selection and found it to have superior resistance to leaf spot, a disease that severely damaged virtually all bluegrasses commercially available at the time.<sup>6</sup> This led to the 1950 release of 'Merion', the first improved Kentucky bluegrass cultivar of which many millions of pounds of seed were sold over the next three decades. For thirty years, Merion was considered the premium lawn grass available in the U.S.<sup>7</sup>

Grau also researched and released a turf species that was new to the U.S. turf market, zoysia. Plant explorers had brought zoysiagrass, a plant native to the Far East, to the U.S. in the early 1900s.<sup>8</sup> Research on the grass by Grau and other Beltsville scientists during the 1940s and '50s led to the release of an improved selection called 'Meyer', named in honor of USDA plant explorer Frank Meyer.<sup>9</sup> 'Meyer' zoysia has been the standard zoysiagrass for use in much of the U.S. since its release.<sup>10</sup> Grau was instrumental in promoting the use of the grass for golf courses and home lawns.

Crownvetch, a legume widely used for erosion control on steep slopes on roadsides and other areas, also owes its development and promotion to Grau.<sup>11</sup>



**Fred V. Grau, image source:**  
<http://tic.msu.edu/images/grau-photo.jpg>

After his retirement from the USDA in 1951, Grau served as a consultant to golf courses and other turf-related facilities and companies.<sup>12</sup> He continued to serve as the director of the USGA Green Section until 1953. He died in 1990 at the age of 88.

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<sup>1</sup> Fred V. Grau, "The Site of the Pentagon: Where Turfgrass once Ruled," *Golf Course Management* (January 1985): 76-79.

<sup>2</sup> Tom Mascaro, "Dr. Fred V. Grau: A Passing Noted...And A Remembrance," *Golf Course Management* 59 (1) (January 1991): 184.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Kent Kurtz, "[An Interview with Dr. Fred Grau at College Park, Maryland.](#)" *Sports Turf Manager* (January/February 2003): 7, 10.

<sup>6</sup> Charles G. Wilson and Fred V. Grau, "[Merion \(B-27\) Bluegrass.](#)" *USGA Journal* (April 1950): 27-29.

<sup>7</sup> Kevin Morris, President, National Turfgrass Federation, "Re: Fred Grau," E-mail message. 28 October 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Fred Grau and Alexander Radko, "[Meyer \(Z-52\) Zoysia.](#)" *USGA Journal and Turf Management* (November 1951):30.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Kevin Morris, "Re: Fred Grau."

<sup>11</sup> "Fred Grau, 88, Dies; Developer of Grasses," 6 December 1990, Property Rights Research, 28 October 2014, [http://propertyrightsresearch.org/2006/articles04/fred\\_grau.htm](http://propertyrightsresearch.org/2006/articles04/fred_grau.htm).

<sup>12</sup> Mascaro, *Golf Course Management*, 184.