

WHEN GROWTH BEGINS

By R. V. Davies, B.Sc.

Golf, unlike the majority of other popular sports, is played throughout the year and in consequence there is no defined close season during which the golf course is closed to allow a period in which maintenance and remedial work can go ahead unhampered by concern for players. Nevertheless courses are generally quieter with fewer competitions during the winter months and there is more scope for controlling play while causing less inconvenience than at other times. Normal maintenance work during the winter is limited by weather conditions, lack of growth and reduced day length and it is not usually until spring that work increases in intensity with the need to produce good playing conditions in time for the busier playing period.

This is always a busy and often difficult time for the greenkeeper but, nevertheless, an interesting one when his judgment has to be at its keenest. This is the time when play increases and the early competitions are being played, very often when growth has hardly made a start. Under these conditions the care greens have received during winter will show up. Those where play has been controlled to prevent use during frosty and wet weather, which have been adequately aerated and protected against disease, will start off in a basically sound condition. They will have a full grass cover and an open freely draining surface which is generally able to take advantage of favourable conditions once they arrive. This is a great advantage in the fight for early growth which is the greenkeeper's annual battle and allows him to proceed at the earliest opportunity with other operations, such as scarifying, which can only safely be undertaken when there is growth.

Compost

There is no reason why deep solid aeration should not be carried out during this early phase to help relieve at least a proportion of the compaction which will inevitably have occurred on

greens during wet winter conditions no matter how much care has been exercised, and to help aerate and dry the top soil. It is worth noting that light application of a good, natural compost, preferably prepared in compost heaps on the course, helps to produce a little slow growth by providing plant nutrient, helps to produce a more desirable green colour in the sward and by forming a mulch helps to keep the surface warm and protect the foliage from intermittent cold spells. Dressings should be no heavier than 2 to 4 lbs per square yard and, of course, brushed into the base of the turf to overcome any danger of the grass being covered over and weakened.

During this early period of light growth the composting can be immediately preceded by careful scarification to remove some of the dead plant material which has dried back over winter and collected in the immediate surface. The compost will then help to protect the scarified surface but, even so, rotary scarifiers should be used only with considerable care as damage can easily be caused by over enthusiasm at this stage, particularly in areas open to the cold, east winds.

Early growth

This early work might typically be possible in late March when mowing will probably still be infrequent with topping being sufficient to control patches of more forward growth in order to maintain overall uniformity. It is not until later, towards the end of April, that the cutter can gradually be reduced in height and frequency increased as more steady growth occurs.

It is only under these conditions, when growth is more reliable, that the spring fertiliser should be applied and under its ensuing effect on growth that more thorough operations such as further scarifying and weed control can be attempted and the cutter reduced to the normal seasonal height of 3/16 in. Even now care is necessary

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because setbacks to growth can continue into May.

Moss

Moss which often collects over winter should normally disappear from healthy greens as growth improves but, where it is more persistent, control measures ought to be completed well before any scarification is undertaken. This will ensure that, if one of the slow acting mercurised moss killers is used, it will have to take full effect before the moss is removed during the course of the scarification work.

Timing

The exact planning of these various operations on the greens in the spring programme can only be a matter of judgment according to each locality and even between courses within a locality, while the variations from year to year make for further complication.

Fairways and Tees

The fairways and tees also have their call for spring treatment but owing to the coarser nature of the turf judgment need not be quite so precise and mechanical work such as spiking and harrowing, or scarification, can be undertaken more confidently while scorching by cold winds or other adverse weather is less likely. Operations on these areas have basically the same requirement of providing reasonable growth as early as possible so as to produce full strong swards in readiness for heavy play. As with greens the effect of care during the winter will show itself at this time of year.

GREENKEEPER RETIRES

OVER 50 years' service as a greenkeeper do not go unnoticed as Knaphill man, Mr Harry Hilder, found out this week. Mr Hilder retired recently after working at Worplesdon Golf Club since 1914. He has been head greenkeeper for 40 years.

Mr Hilder, 67, of 63 Highclere Road, Knaphill, was presented with a cheque and a gold watch on Sunday by the club captain, Mr Stanley Bassett. Many members were present at the ceremony. Mr Hilder also received a gift from the club on the occasion of his 50 years with it.

Mr Hilder went to Worplesdon Golf Club at the age of 14 years and, after four months, he received his first token of appreciation from the club—a one shilling per week rise.

Mr Hilder was called up in both wars. He was not called up for the First World War until 1918 because of his age and by the time he had finished his training the war was over. In the Second World War he served for four years, partly in Iran. He came back to Britain for D-Day, and returned to greenkeeping shortly after the war was ended.

Mr Hilder was born in Knaphill. His wife comes from Yorkshire. They have been married for 34 years.

Retirement will be only partial for Harry Hilder, as the club has asked him to continue to visit the club on two days each week as a sort of supervisor among the greenkeepers.

With acknowledgements to the "Woking News and Mail", 3rd February 1968.

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