

Long, hard look at turf

Extracts from a paper entitled "Composition and Nourishment of Amenity Swards" delivered by Robert W. Palin, Technical Director, Suttons Seeds Ltd., London Road, Reading, at a Seminar, "Turf 75", held at Reading University.

I HAVE already commented upon the fact that there is probably more general leisure time than ever before for most of the populace. There is also more sport being played and it is not unreasonable to suppose that most given areas of sports turf are required to accommodate more and more facilities each year, which must involve the available turf in excessive wear and tear. So much so, in fact, that one is now being asked to advise on the construction and maintenance of "all weather surfaces" for winter games, and synthetic or simulated grass for both lawns and games areas.

Before we find ourselves in the position of having decisions made for us in regard to what sort of grasses we require, let us take a long hard look at the grass swards with which we are involved and ask ourselves a few pertinent questions:

1. What sort of playing surface do I need?

2. How long is it expected to last?
3. How much will I have to spend in general maintenance?

Those three will do to begin with and in themselves each hide a string of related questions. Let us take them one by one . . .

What sort of Playing Surface do I Need?

- (a) If I have a general sports complex in my care I cannot answer this question in a few words—each sport to be catered for will dictate the surface needed.
- (b) If I have a Golf Course—the greens, approaches, tees, semi-rough, rough and fairways will all proclaim their special needs.
- (c) The local park will demand purely aesthetic turf, that to take wear and tear despite "Please Keep off the Grass" notices and that to stand up to the "rough and tumble" of children's play.

Despite the varied peculiar demands of each sport there are, of course, certain **basic** requirements which are indeed the same in 1975 as they were in 1875, or even in 1775!!

- (i) There must be a blending of compatible plants.
- (ii) These plants must grow in harmony producing a dense covering to the earth's surface.
- (iii) The complete plant must not only

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cover the surface but ramify the soil.

- (iv) The herbage must be able to survive defoliation to a greater or lesser degree.
- (v) The plants must be sufficiently robust as to withstand the vagaries of climate and the superficial damage of usage.
- (vi) As far as possible the same plants should be of botanically perennial classification and of evergreen habit.

In the United Kingdom seldom do we find a single species—or rather single cultivar grass sward capable of providing and/or withstanding the foregoing formidable list. Mostly the natural turf of the mountain hills, the downs, the sea marshes is made up of both tufted and creeping sorts—remember my earlier quotation in regard to *FESTUCA OVINA TENUIFOLIA* . . .

“Although most useful in mixture with other grasses, a homogenous turf cannot be obtained from Fine Leaved

Sheep's Fescue alone as its habit is to grow in dense tufts which have an antipathy to each other.”

This emphasises the need for more than one grass in the composition of turf—add a Creeping Fescue—add a Creeping *Agrostis* and you have the **natural** blend of both creeping and tufted sorts. It would indeed be a tragedy were we to go forward into 1975 and beyond, misguided in the belief that the turf needed in these Islands is that from far across the sea and of a single type—creeping either by means of stolons or rhizomes—we could so easily be misled—have indeed in comparatively recent times **been** misled, albeit domestically, in the unwarranted and unsatisfactory use of *AGROSTIS stolonifera*—a cultivar of which, according to some reports, was “a chance mutation as a result of the Atom Bomb”. Such grasses have their place in the order of things and in certain locations are the natural answer to man's need of sporting turf. In our

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climate other grasses are in all respects more suitable.

There must indeed be a blending of compatible plants—an assortment of the botanically creeping and tufted sorts.

Plants can only grow in harmony if they are suited the one to the other and again I would hark back to my earlier quotation and refer to TRIFOLIUM REPENS PERENNE (Perennial White Clover) . . .

“ . . . it may become too abundant, and seed should be sown with discretion.”

Not only should the choice of subject be made with extreme care but so should the amount by weight of seed employed for each species and/or cultivar be decided upon with the utmost prudence. Too much AGROSTIS, too much LOLIUM or the converse in each case can only lead to an unharmonious blend—a poor unnatural sward which will be an inadequate cover to the earth.

The complete plant must not only cover the surface, but ramify the soil—why so?

I have purposely chosen the words “complete plant” for there are always those who seem to believe that the grass plant is unique in that it may be utterly defoliated and yet happily survive—as evidenced by the “Brown Wicket Brigade” amongst our cricketering friends. Truly some few—but very few—grasses may survive such brutality — perhaps these really do scream in protest—they would certainly have their entitlement so to do—but even these cannot survive constant and prolonged defoliation.

- Mr Palin's analysis will be concluded in a future issue



HISTORY was made on September 12th when the first public house in the U.K. featuring the noble art of Greenkeeping was opened. Owned by brewers Greene King, the pub, appropriately named “The Greenkeeper”, was built as the entrance to Thorpe Wood Golf Course, the only municipal course in Peterborough, 1½ miles west of the city on the new A.47 road. In case you don't identify yourself with the character depicted, the artist was a lady, her model unknown. Will the offending greenkeeper please stand up. Our thanks are due to Mr. F. E. Sismey, Head Greenkeeper at Peterborough Milton G.C., for this information.



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