



The Question Of Potassium And Phosphate Fertilisers

In response to Craig Stewart's article *A Point To Ponder* (*Greenkeeper*, May), I wish to express my thoughts on the subject of phosphate and potassium fertilisers. As I understand it, phosphate is essential for root growth. I agree a soil devoid of phosphate would show little or no growth, but as plants and grasses cover most of the UK, I am inclined to think there is already sufficient of this mineral in most soils.

In greenkeeping, when we apply phosphate in any form—and there are many super phosphates, bone meal, slags, triple superphosphates—we are, in fact, overfeeding the soil and in cases of pH variables of less than 5.5, phosphate will simply not be available to the plant because of the lock-up effect of acidity, back to overfeeding, etc.

As Craig, Stirling's course manager states, insolubles may cause a problem, but not I am sure in the soil. This insoluble content, according to research, remains where it is dropped—ie. in the top layer of the turf—and, as I see it, promotes rigorous root growth in the top inch or so of turf and practically grows thatch, as well as producing a dreadful, fluffy top growth of grass. Any fertiliser that does as I have described cannot be an aid to producing fine, firm, textured greens and is better forgotten. However, I have found it useful in producing, together with drastic aeration, a pleasant top growth on golf tees after a full winter's play. Unfortunately, disease inevitably followed.

Potash is described as being essential, combined with phosphate, to promote root growth—also invaluable in producing seed (gasps of horror). Think of all those *Poa Annua* greens in early summer (enough said).

We cannot write off these methods without offering alternatives. This is where the high degree of artistry comes into our job. As I stated earlier, our soils generally have adequate mineral content. In most cases, roots merely cannot get down to it, so we are not making the most of our natural soil reserves, hence the apparent need to overfeed.

To produce a healthy soil (turf that hardly needs feeding, barely requires water and is virtually indestructible), it is widely known that aeration, drying ground (particularly dry), seaweed extracts and organic feeding are required.

Aeration at depth is essential, whether by mole ploughing, vibratory ploughing or deep slitting. Hollow coring should be avoided as it merely forms a pan and makes surfaces soft and shortens the duration that perfect putting surfaces can be obtained. All-year-round usage will make greens firm, provided aeration is practiced in late autumn, winter and early spring. I cannot see the point in spoiling perfect putting greens in late spring, summer and early autumn unless automatic irrigation is available.

The drying out of greens is a very controversial topic, but in cases where shallow-rooted grasses are a problem, it remains unsurpassed as a means of inducing textured

greens and imparting deep roots, provided aeration has taken place in winter months. If not, don't bother, as it is a waste of time. What happens in dry winter weather is that, under limited watering, the soil shrinks as water evaporates and the spike and plough marks open in the soil, into which the roots probe in search of moisture. Now we are looking for an alternative to phosphate in order to stimulate the roots further. This we find in the resurrected seaweed products. Enough has been said about these, but it is easy to understand how, when used in such conditions or with a wetting agent, dramatic root growth can be achieved without the detrimental effects resulting from phosphate fertilisers.

These seaweed products contain alginic acid and are powerful bacterial activators, so let the soil bacteria work for you over a period of time. They will break down the soil and release all the elements necessary for the type of grass growth needed.

The main benefit in organic feeding is that it will allow you to carry greens through a summer drought. Whereas, granulars tend to require more water to sustain the more succulent growth they promote.

*Alexander Blacklaw, Golf Course Manager,
Crow Wood Golf Club.*

Obituary—Bill Beveridge

It was with deep regret that we heard of the death of our dear friend and colleague Bill Beveridge. Bill was taken ill on Monday, May 4 and it came as a great shock to his multitude of friends in the greenkeeping fraternity and associated trades to realise that a friend for over 40 years was no longer with us.

A mark of respect to The Man was the throng of mourners who crammed into the large chapel at Wariston Crematorium, Edinburgh, where the service was conducted by the Rev Cameron. The minister asked mourners to remember Bill in their prayers. I know that all who had close contact with him will put Bill in that special place reserved for exceptional friends.

We all looked on Bill as Ransomes' man in Scotland. In the past few years, he travelled all over Britain. Some of us, particularly the older greenkeepers, grew up with Bill and followed him through his career, from Morton Engineering to Ransomes, to war service with the RAF, then back to Ransomes. We remember Bill with his RAF tie, which he so proudly sported, dressed, as he always was, immaculately!

We thought of Bill more as a friend than a sales rep, although an excellent salesman he was. It was said that if there was a sniff of a sale in the wind, Bill would be on the doorstep, not pushing his wares, but pleasantly letting you know what was available to suit your pocket and purpose.

He was seldom absent from any golf outing. Indeed, the east and north sections will have difficulty filling his place as match secretary and general factotum at their spring and autumn meetings. The other sections will miss his assistance in many respects, not least the marking and checking of scorecards and other behind-the-scenes activities. More so, he will be missed by all of us as an active and respected member of SIGGA.

At this sad time, our hearts are with Bill's wife Rina, Bill's son Crawford and his family.

Jimmy Kidd, Estates Manager, Gleneagles Hotel.