

# CASE STUDY

## OSMOCOTE N SLOW RELEASE FERTILISER

**H**EAVY play on a golf course may be seen as a sign of success but can lead to problems for the greenkeeper responsible for keeping it playable all year. Fitting in tee maintenance on a busy course can be a headache and it is this particular issue that I recently discussed with the course managers of three packed courses.

The Hatfield London Country Club at Essendon, Hertfordshire comprises an 18 hole golf course and a 9 hole pitch and putt on 156 acres. The owners are investing in major improvements including construction of sub-greens and secondary tees on all holes. There are no members. The course is open to the public on green fees.

'We have seven minute teeing times. The course is packed everyday. There's someone on the tee all the time from 7.30 a.m.' said Peter Creary, Head Greenkeeper and course manager. He estimated that two hundred rounds are played each day in summer. Winter use is heavy as numbers are swelled by players from private courses which close for winter.

The tees suffer exceptionally heavy wear, particularly at short holes. 'Being a public course we get a great variation in standards of play.

'To strengthen tee swards we have used dwarf rye grass instead of trying to encourage the finer grasses. It gives a coarser finish but it's necessary on a course that gets as much wear as this one'.

'It was incorporated into the turf last year. The results haven't been as good as I expected, due to the drought and very heavy wear' he explained.

Last March Mr Creary applied Osmocote N (39:0:0) controlled release fertiliser, supplied by Sierra UK Limited, at 1 oz/sq yd on all tees and aprons. It was applied with a cyclone type spreader. 'I knew it has been used with good results at Chadwell Spring Golf Course. I'd used other Osmocote products in tree planting work so I decided to try it,' explained Mr Creary.

The fertiliser granules are coated in organic resin which determines daily release of nitrogen depending solely on temperature. With an average soil temperature of 21°C this application should last 5 months.

Because nitrogen release is not affected by soil type, irrigation water, soil pH, activity of soil microbes or external salt concentration, a steady, season long release results in regular turf growth. Nutrient release closely mirrors turf growth so leaching into the surrounding soil does not occur.

Mr Creary is pleased with the results. 'It's fairly expensive, but it's economical because you only apply it once. The quality of the grass is better than normal and would be even better with more rain' he commented.

The tees and aprons are cut to 1/2 inch. The Osmocote N granules are small and are not picked up by mowers.



'This year the grass on the tees is holding up very well. We didn't see a flush of spring growth, as you do with a soluble fertiliser' said Mr Creary. There were no green patches at tee edges from fertiliser runoff. The grass re-established quickly after rain. 'An even growth rate must be better for the turf' he said.

The steady grass growth on tees allowed mowing to be reduced to once or twice a week last summer. 'Regulating mowing frees time for jobs elsewhere, for example on construction with which we're busy' he added.

This year he plans to use Osmocote N on selected approach fairways. 'These are heavy wear areas with tractors turning where a lot of wedge and chip shots are played. I'm selecting the worst ones to try and get these surfaces to recover quicker.' He is considering it for greens, working it into the surface when hollow tining to prevent it being mowed out.

### REDUCING POA ANNUA

At Hadley Wood Golf Club, Barnet, amid green and wealthy suburbs, Andrew Phillips, Head Greenkeeper heads a team of five staff.

The 18 hole course covers 130 acres. There are 600 private members and public can play for green fees providing they have a handicap certificate.

A five year drainage scheme commenced in January 89 to drain winter wet areas. Ongoing removal of invasive scrub oak is taking the course back to its original shape.

The greens contain 70-80% Poa annua grass. 'All our maintenance is geared to reducing the amount of meadow grass in the greens and encouraging bents and fescues' said Mr Phillips. Fescues are difficult to establish on heavy clay soil.

To achieve this he uses non-phosphate fertilisers and summer watering is minimal. 'This keeps the grass alive and helps parch out the bad grass' he said. He verticuts weekly in summer. In winter he uses tractor drawn aerators and vertidrainage with 12-14 inch solid tines.

This has reduced the poa annua by 10% in the last three years. 'It'll take between 3-10 years to reduce it to 50%. I'd be very happy with that' he said.

The heaviest wear is on tees. Top dressing divots is a continuous activity. 'It is etiquette to fill in your own divot if there's a soil box provided. We provide these on par 3 tees, but players just don't do it!' remarked Mr Phillips.

Tees contain smooth stalked meadow grass, perennial rye grass and small amounts of bents and fescues. Automatic watering is available on most tees but is used once every three weeks. He uses one fertiliser dressing in early spring and regular applications of liquid organic nitrogen through the summer, depending on turf condition.

In 1988, out of curiosity, he used Osmocote N at 3/4 oz/sq yd on medal tees. Last year he used 2 to 3 oz per sq yd of tees.

It was applied in early April using a cyclone type spreader. The tees dressed with Osmocote N stayed very green. There was no flush of spring growth, just a steady growth all summer. 'When it rains the grass greens up very quickly, even the dry areas that burnt off in the drought' he said. 'I'll use it again next year, possibly on all tees.'

### GOLFERS LIKE SHEEP

Trevor Oxtoby, Head Greenkeeper and Malcolm Reding, General Manager of the North Middlesex Golf Club, Friern Barnet, estimate that 40,000 rounds are played there per year. 'We have 500 members and we've seen an increase in green fees this year,' said Mr Oxtoby. He attributed this to the fine weather and other local courses being out of condition.

The course, leased from the council, cover 78 acres. All boundaries are urban. Dotted with specimen trees, the course sweeps down from the elegant white club house, formerly the manor house, to a small lake.

The size of the course means that player traffic is concentrated, particularly on entries and exits to greens and tees and between nearest bunkers and the next tees. 'Golfers are like sheep - you can put signs but none of them read them. They just follow each other!' commented Mr Oxtoby.

Short tees are furnished with bins for divot filling. 'We don't get as much co-operation from players as we would like!' he said.

Average tee area is about 2/3 normal size. To save wear, grass tees are not used in winter. 'We play off mats and are experimenting with different types at the moment. For competitions you need to get as near the yardage markers as possible, so some mats are placed on the tees. This requires some renovation work the following spring' said Mr Oxtoby.

He used 1 oz/sq yd of Osmocote N fertiliser last spring on all tees. The outdated irrigation system and summer drought prevented achievement of the full benefits of tee greening. 'It is economical because you apply it once. I'll use it next spring to give it a fair trial. I'm after the good aesthetic effect I believe it can produce' he said.

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