

## SPRING TURF MAINTENANCE

**N**OW that winter has passed! and most of the major construction work, such as enlargement of tees, drainage, the renovation of bunkers and walkways, are coming to an end, I look forward to spring.

March and April are still busy months with many other important jobs yet to be done, before we start mowing in earnest. The work will include patching fairways and general areas that have been damaged by normal compaction and last years drought.

I know, seaside links with their light sandy soils are a big advantage to work on through the wet winter months, compared to the heavy type soils on the inland courses, where one cannot take a tractor-trailer for perhaps the whole winter!

A lot of people tend to think links courses look after themselves, but I can assure you, maintenance can be quite high especially following a dry hot summer as we experienced last year, with top soil being less than 1/2" in depth in places, erosion takes place quite easily.

Rabbits for example seemed to thrive on dry conditions, and last year they were more active than usual. I suppose digging in the dry soft sand must have been sheer joy!!

Personally, I don't like to kill them in summer months when they are breeding and have young, but declare war during the winter period when the undergrowth has died off giving them less cover. I am lucky, because some of the greenkeepers are good shots and enjoy the odd night lamping. We will now step up the night shooting and thin them out before the pests start breeding in earnest.

Talking of pests, moles seem to be on the increase. These lovely creatures are rarely seen, and many greenkeepers just smooth over their earthmounds but do not bother to eliminate them, so they go quietly about their business and breed three to four young each year. Trapping and baiting are the normal methods of elimination, but stop their supply of food (mainly worms), and they will have to travel elsewhere, (maybe Safeways), or anywhere except on the golf course.

Once again in our area there shows signs of another bumper crop of Leatherjackets this year. During a quite mild spell of weather, just after the Christmas period, we sprayed and had a very good kill. I was quite surprised how many of the blighters there were, so if



*George Brown is pictured, above right, with an assistant on his beloved Turnberry course with the lighthouse in the background.*

you have not had a chance to spray yet, it is not too late to do so.

Almost a year ago, we purchased a new tractor mounted sprayer, but never really had the chance to use it. The text books will tell you the best time to spray for weeds would be in the spring or throughout the growing season. (I threw the rule book away several times last year). We normally spray end of April or May, but gale force winds or rain prevented us from doing this, and by the end of May it was too dry, but surely it must rain soon, we are on the west coast of Scotland!

Anyway, as we all know it was at least the end of August before the grasses had recovered enough to even think about it, September too busy with tournaments, October too windy, November too late! (Do you know the feeling?)

The rule book was also thrown away regarding watering, we don't overwater, but how much is too much, especially when we had the hottest summer since records began, 1909? However, many people enjoyed the hot summer, it made a change. I know the irrigation companies enjoyed it, I understand their order books are quite full.

During March and April we do considerable work on our pop-up sprinklers, many of the heads have sunk well below ground level (or is it the regular top dressing that raises the surface levels). I know we have a few hundred, and many of them are rarely used, and soon

become overgrown. They also stick down - especially on sandy soils. (I once thought 'pop-ups' were supposed to save labour!)

The irrigation system will be now primed and ready for testing. Pumps and motors have already been checked and serviced during the winter months (haven't they?). So now to check for broken pipes and cables. We have learnt in the past just how versatile the vertidrain can be, there is no better machine for finding shallow irrigation pipes, as well as doing its intended mission.

After repairing the damaged pipework and making good the turf, we will be hoping to get the drying easterly winds, which will allow us to verticut some low lying fairways that have more vigorous growth. Tees and greens will also have their first gentle verticut of the season, followed by a light top dressing of sandy soil (70-30 mix).

I know there is a difference of opinion when one should apply spring organic fertilisers, but that will depend upon the geographical location of the golf course, for example weather conditions can vary tremendously between the North, East, South and West of Britain, not just in temperature, the biggest difference being annual rainfall. (East coast courses may have an average between 19" to 23", compare that to the west coast where rainfall can be anything between 40" to 80" in the northwest, (they don't get the love-

ly green hills and lochs for nothing.)

Another sign of spring is when certain members who have been trying to tell you how to run your golf course all season, suddenly invite you to pop round and just have a look at their lawn, (because it is in a dreadful state!)

I was interested to read the document 'The Way Forward', prepared by a greenkeeping panel appointed by the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews. The document is critical and certainly does not pull any punches. So do find time to read it. One point is put over very clearly, and that is the need for golf courses to have mud free fairways and firm fast greens all year round!

Being a links man myself, I fully agree with the panel, although this will be achieved much more easily on the drier easterly courses than those on the damper west, that have double rainfall.

Anyway, enough of rainfall, spring is almost here, fertilisers are on and we start our cutting. We serviced our mowing machines (haven't we?), they have been rebladed and sharpened (haven't they?). We have painted our flagsticks (haven't we?). We have ordered our new flags (haven't we?).

Must go now, there appear to be a few things I have forgot! Happy mowing?

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