

The Danger of Opening Putting Greens for Play in March

By PETER LEES.

WITH the coming of Spring the Green Committees will soon be preparing for the golfing season, which is fast approaching, and the work of preparing the putting greens and fairways will occupy a large part of their attention.

One of the mistakes frequently made by Green Committees is to open the greens for play in March. More harm can be done in one day at this time than can be rectified in weeks afterward, and many clubs that find their greens in poor shape in the summer could trace the trouble to this source. The weather may be fine and warm during the daytime, but frosts will frequently be experienced at night, and if the grass is subjected to the wear and tear of play in addition to having to resist the weather conditions, it naturally will suffer greatly. After the Winter snows and frosts the surface of the putting green is loose and soft, the greenkeeper not yet having had time to work them up to a firmer condition. If played on at this time the bad effects will be apparent later on.

After his long absence from the game, the golfer is very anxious to get started again, and at the first sign of good weather, he is at the club ready to play. He expects to find the Summer greens with the holes cut and flags in position all ready for use, and does not like the idea of using temporary or "relief" greens. Personally, I recommend these with great diffidence at any time, but in circumstances like the above I think that the golfer ought to bear with the committee and put up with them until such time as the Summer greens may be opened up with no danger of damaging them.

The use of temporary greens will also help the greenkeeper to bring the regular greens to first-class condition, and he would have the knowledge that he ran no risk of spoiling them for the busy season. The results obtained by

the use of a little forbearance in the early Spring will be more than repaid by putting greens of superior quality a little later in the season.

Another important point to be considered is that if the greens are not used too early, the grass will recover from the effects of the winter and the young shoots will have become much stronger and better able to withstand the wear and tear of play.

The temporary, or relief greens can be made as near the Summer greens as desired, and are of course on the fairway. They should be on the approach, if possible. The work expended on them will improve this important part of the fairway by truing it for play when the ordinary or Summer green is opened.

At best, golf in March cannot be considered seriously under any circumstances, and this applies particularly to putting, as conditions are all against it.

Spring Renovation Work

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JUST as soon as the frost is out of the ground and the soil is dry and in good condition, golf clubs should commence the renovation of their courses. It is usually quite safe to figure on starting this work about the 1st of April, but of course it all depends upon the locality and whether the soil is of a sandy, medium or heavy nature.

The chief causes of a worn or poor turf are hard usage, poverty of the soil, the damage done by extremes of temperature, or the want of proper drainage; the result of hard usage and extremes of temperature is shown by the appearance of bare patches; the sign of poverty is a thin turf, and bare patches with moss and stagnant water usually denote faulty drainage.

Some greens will possibly be found in very good condition, with a thick, fine turf, and quite free from weeds. Nevertheless, they should be renovated and strengthened so as to make them better able to withstand a severe summer season and heavy play.

Treating the Putting Greens.

(1) If the greens are infested with earth worms, select a mild, muggy day, when the soil is moist, and apply a good worm eradicator, so as to rid the greens of them before seeding. If the worms are not active, postpone taking them out until wet weather the end of April or May, or when troublesome in the Autumn.

(2) Improve the drainage, if necessary.

(3) Mow the grass quite close, if any growth has started and the grass is long.

Note.—Most clubs have had prepared the year before a sufficient quantity of compost to give all the greens several light top-dressings at the rate of about one load per 200 to 300 super yards (1 cubic yard covering 150 square yards to the depth of a quarter inch), and during the past Fall and Winter have had prepared next year's and the following year's supply. Several good rich compost heaps on a golf course are very essential and important. A compost heap should be made up in layers of about one foot thick, in the following order: (1) The best black soil obtainable; (2) sand; (3) stable manure, leaf mould or humus; or, if for use on a sandy soil course, (1) soil; (2) stable manure, leaf mould or humus. Finish off all heaps with soil.

Compost should be allowed to stand in heaps or pits for about a year; therefore, in starting, make twice as much as is necessary for the first year, and when one heap is used, make another, using the coarse stuff sifted out of the used heap to make the foundation of the new one. The heaps should be stirred up and turned over once or twice a year.

To get humus, dig out peat from river or pond bed, *lime it well* and allow it to stand for at least a year or two. If no deposit is available and you wish to save delay, buy Rex Humus. Make leaf moulds every Fall with soil and leaves, and sometimes add sand.

(4) Apply to all low, wet, sour, heavy greens some pulverized charcoal, at the rate of from 200 to 300 lbs. per green

75 feet square, to purify and sweeten the soil. It should, however, be mixed with sand for heavy soils and applied when the soil is moist and soft and best able to absorb it. Worms do not like charcoal.

(5) With the necessary dressing on hand and already sifted for use, vigorously rake and cross rake the greens with sharp iron rakes, working in the dressing of charcoal and sand, and so as to thoroughly open up the surface soil and allow the young grass later on to penetrate the old turf. The more the existing plants appear to be ruined, short of actually pulling them out by the roots, the better will be the results. The large patches of weeds should be taken out first by hand and the small ones can be scratched out in raking.

(6) The next operation depends entirely upon the soil and conditions. If the soil is sandy or poor or thin, the greens should be thinly top-dressed, to a thickness of about one-quarter to one-half inch, with sifted prepared compost, mixed with some good complete artificial grass manure, and the same worked into the existing turf with birch brooms, at the same time correcting the cuppy places. If the turf is in fairly good condition, one dressing after sowing the seed is sufficient. There is nothing better for a dressing than humus, and its use will give even better results than a compost pile. Enough should be on hand to last for several dressings, as this will be more economical. It is especially useful where much seeding is done as it has the tendency to cause quicker germination.

(7) Sow a mixture of the finest grass seed, especially prepared to suit the soil and climate, at the rate of from one-half bushel to two bushels per green, according to the size of the green and the condition of the existing turf.

(8) Cover the seed not deeper than one quarter inch by applying a thin top-dressing of sifted compost, and work the seed and covering soil into the existing turf with birch brooms or the backs of rakes.

(9) Roll with an ordinary hand roller.

It is usually necessary to close the putting greens for play during Spring renovation work, especially when they need considerable attention and when the soil is heavy and sticky. It is then advisable to play temporary greens for four or five weeks, until the soil and turf is in an improved condition and the young grass has made a start.

After Treatment.—On light, dry soils composts cannot be too freely used, because not only do they add to the fertility of the soil, but also add humus, which tends to keep it cool and conserve the moisture. On all soils it is usually well to apply a very thin top-dressing about the last of May or just before the hot Summer season arrives, and monthly "dustings," watered in so as to give a little protection to the roots of the young grass, and keep the turf strong and healthy, it being known that young grass suffers more from the heat than the cold.

How to Treat the Fair Greens.

Select the important parts—viz., the "lies" and "approaches"—and renovate the weak and thin places as follows:

(1) Apply air-slaked lime at the rate of about 500 to 100 lbs. per acre to all low, sour, wet parts when the soil is thawing out or moist, so that it will disappear quickly.

(2) Tooth-harrow the ground in both directions so as to open up the surface soil.

(3) Sow a mixture of the finest grass seed especially prepared to suit the soil and climate at the rate of from two to six bushels per acre, according to the condition of the existing turf.

(4) Top-dress as many of the "lies" and "approaches" as is possible with a compost or sifted soil mixed with complete artificial fertilizer, covering the seed not deeper than one-quarter inch.

(5) Brush-harrow the covering soil and seed into the existing turf, correct-

ing the cuppy places, and then roll with an ordinary grass roller.

A Few Good Points to Remember.

Don't roll down worm casts on heavy soil greens; it is better to take the worms out with an eradicator. Always keep putting greens free from weeds; water them only in the late afternoons and evenings. Keep the turf nursery in good condition, so as to be able to patch the greens and tees when necessary. Continually repair divot marks and weak places with sifted rich soil and seed mixed together before use.

Never use heavy rollers on clay soil, with the possible exception of once or twice in the Spring season or dry weather.

In making new greens and fairways, always use plenty of manure and humus for the following reasons: Grass in its young state grows very slowly, and is easily damaged by adverse weather; therefore, the quicker it is rushed through the critical period (or, in other words, becomes established) the better. If the ground is well manured and the humus is kept quite close to the surface, the young plants will root straight into it and gather strength generally, which will enable them to come through a period of bad weather, which might easily kill a poorly nourished plant, but it will also enable them to close up quicker.

It is generally admitted that the mortality of all life is greatest during the early period of existence, and that a well-nourished organism is better able to withstand a period of stress than is an ill-nourished weakling.

When there is an occasion to use chemical fertilizers, it is very important to be careful of the quantity. It is very easy to use too much, and an expert should be consulted.

Never buy cheap grass seed. Always use the very best quality, and never experiment with recommendations given by would-be experts or you may be like the man in the fable who tried to please everybody. He pleased nobody and lost his donkey in the bargain.