No longer voodoo science, tailor-made composts coming

By MARK LESLIE

Having conquered the nursery industry, scientists researching the disease-suppressive capabilities of compost anticipate barrier-breaking improvements in the golf and landscape industries in the near future.

"This is no longer voodoo, but real science," said Dr. Harry A.J. Hoitink, professor of plant pathology in the environmental graduate studies program at Ohio State University.

Hoitink, who has been researching solid-waste compost and its disease-suppressive capabilities since 1972, predicts that "tailor-made composts are coming." Specifically, use of yeast-trimming composts in top dressing and in root-zone mixes in golf course construction will bring wide-ranging improvements in turfgrass maintenance, he said.

"The net effect I project in the next decade," Hoitink said, "will probably see a gradual phasing out of fungicides used to control root disease.

"We may see decreased insect problems, also, although much of that remains to be documented. Since stress aggravates insect problems, compost alleviates stress in plants, it will help in this area as well."

A prize student of Hoitink's from 1978-82, Cornell University Associate Professor of Plant Pathology Eric Nelson agrees that composts will "dramatically reduce" fungicide use.

In some of our monitoring studies on golf courses in the Rochester (N.Y.) area, over a three-year period of strictly using compost on fairways, they reduced Pythium fungicide applications by 89 percent," Nelson said. "We're still pulling together data on fungicide use at other courses. I predict you'll find similar reductions elsewhere.

"Presumably, we would be able to reduce insecticide use as well, particularly if these composts possess insecticidal properties."

To that end, Cornell Professors of Entomology Mike Villani and Roxanne Broadway are searching for insecticidal compounds in composts and have been able to isolate proteins with insecticidal activity.

"We established 10 to 15 years ago that there is not a soil-borne disease in plants that we cannot control with compost," Hoitink said. "If we look at undis turbed natural ecosystems, such as hard."

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Tour of Duty

HAROLD VAUBEL
LaCosta Country Club
Carlsbad, Calif.

Infiniti Tournament of Champions
Jan. 7-10, NBC

Harold Vaneil, 40, has been head superintendent at LaCosta for three years. He came to Carlsbad from the TPC at Starr Pass in Arizona, where he helped build the course and served as head superintendent. A native of Peoria, Ill., Vaneil is a graduate of the University of Arizona in Tucson.

Things to look for: "From an agronomic standpoint, to get ready for the Tournament of Champions, we've been rebuilding all our greens to USGA specifications. After this year, we'll only have four left [to renovate]. The ones that haven't been rebuilt are all TV holes: 11, 14, 15 and 18."

Made-for-TV preparations: "Basically, most of what we do is a tremendous amount of landscaping. We try to put a bunch of flowering plants and poinsettias behind the tee boxes. I feel this heightens the player a lot better. It makes him stand out better on television."

"We also triplex our fairways specially for the tournament. The reason we use a five-gang, but I think the triplex makes the fairways look more dramatic."

Editor's note: "Tour of Duty" will be a regular feature this year in Golf Course News. It is designed to celebrate the PGA Tour's amusing, underpublicized hero: the superintendent.

GLEERALD YOZA
Waialae Country Club
Honolulu, Haw.

United Airlines Hawaiian Open Jan. 14-17, Turner

Gerald Yoza, 40, has spent all of his 16-year-tour career at Waialae. "Starting out in the traps, just like everyone else," he recalls. He was named head superintendent two years ago. A native of Oahu, he is also a graduate of the University of Hawaii.

Things to look for: "We've been through a renovation with Desmon Muirhead [and Ed Connors of Golfforms] since last year's tournament. We've added some mounding and quite a few strategic traps. Desmond is an excellent guy to work with. He's got a great eye... A lot has happened since last year. We've had a flash flood, a hurricane, a wind storm and a reno-vation in the last 12-13 months. It's been an unusual year. Busy."

Made-for-TV preparations: "Because this is a Bermuda course, we change the mowing height in the rough. If we kept a tournament-cut all year around, we'd fit it right out of the membership... We add one more cutting height for the tournament, an intermediate cut at 1-1/2 inches. We keep the fairways at 7/16ths all year."

TIGHE SHIELDS
TPC of Scottsdale
Scottsdale, Ariz.
Phoenix Open Jan. 28-31, CBS

Tighe Shields, 42, has been head superintendent at the 36-hole TPC of Scottsdale since 1989. A native of Indiana, he grew up in Arizona and matriculated at Arizona State University in Tempe. Before coming to the TPC, he was head superintendent at the Arizona Country Club in downtown Phoenix from 1975-88.

Things to look for: "Being in the belt we're in, we oversee in October and early November to get the golf course reestablished very quickly. We have to be tournament-ready in early January, which is our coldest period of the year. We have to be in the condition you might normally expect in March or April, which is tough for us."

Made-for-TV preparations: "We generally have TV only on the back nine, so we oversee them first and apply an extremely concentrated fertilizer program... We also spray the fairways — four times, wall-to-wall — with liquid applications of iron to get the deepest, darkest green we can. Part of our look is to have extremely dark green playing areas while keeping the bunker outlines a golden yellow. We do this by setting the bunker outlines go dormant, and we spray them with Diquat. We think this better distinguishes the bunker areas on TV — and the players say they like it."