“Ask Me Another”

By NOAH LOTT

Question — Our course was built three years ago, and the greens were planted with creeping bent stolons. We have a good covering of grass on the greens, but unless we water every day in dry spells the turf on portions of the green turns brown. The surface dries out quickly after a rain. We have been told we have “brown patch,” but the treatments recommended by the Green Section do not correct the trouble.

Answer — This condition is no doubt due to faulty construction of the greens and not to brown patch. Take a hole cutter and cut into the greens, both where the grass is ailing and where it is healthy. A comparison of the soils in the two places should give you a clue as to the cause of the trouble.

In the days when the “layer cake” principle was followed in building greens such conditions as you describe were quite common. A layer of cinders, sand, or black muck, “humus,” which is not thoroughly mixed with the soil, will cut off the capillary rise of water from below and as grass roots will not push their way through the layer the turf has to grow on what little soil and moisture there happens to be above it. The best remedy is to lift the sod and remove whatever you find is doing the damage and then relay the sod. This may be done on a half of a green at a time without serious interruption of play.

Question — Our course is on a heavy clay soil and our greens become very hard during the summer unless kept soaking wet. Is there anything we can do to remedy this condition?

Answer — Yes. Sand is the remedy. If you can get good sharp builder’s sand you can apply it direct as a top dressing. Sharp sand will cut into the clay and spread out evenly in the soil in the course of a few weeks. It is best to use but a half yard of the sand to six thousand square feet of green at a time unless experience shows spikes driven through it. The perforations should be straight down for four or five inches. Do not tear the sod to pieces on the surface. Follow the spiking immediately with a top dressing of sharp sand and be sure to work this sand into the spike holes.

Question — Do you recommend the use of charcoal as a top dressing for greens?

Answer — We do not. First of all, charcoal is not a plant food. It is contained in all plants, but it is obtained by them from a gas, carbon dioxide, always present in the air, and not from the solid. Charcoal or carbon is about the most inert material known. It does not rot or undergo any changes from the weather. It is insoluble and so unavailable as food.

From the nature of the material it will not cut into the clay the same as will sharp sand. The only reason many greens have not been ruined by the use of charcoal is because it is so light that it is either blown away by winds or is washed off the surface by rains. The stuff sold golf courses under the name of “humus” is mainly carbon, hence its black color. Many greenkeepers know to their sorrow what to expect when a layer of humus gets buried about an inch below the surface with top dressings. You would experience the same troubles if the layer happened to be charcoal.

Question — Why is it a light application of ammonium sulphate is beneficial to grass while heavier applications burn and may kill it?

Answer — Plants take in their food in solution. The soil moisture passes into it may be applied heavier than that with no ill effects. There is no danger of overdosing the sanding on heavy clay if the sand cuts in and disappears. If it stays in a layer it may cause future trouble after it has been buried with top dressing. Good results may be obtained by spiking the green with a fork or a board with spikes driven through it. The perforations should be straight down for four or five inches. Do not tear the sod to pieces on the surface. Follow the spiking immediately with a top dressing of sharp sand and be sure to work this sand into the spike holes.

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