



# DR. FRED V. GRAU

## ANSWERS TO TURF QUESTIONS

### MINIMUM MAINTENANCE

Every once in a while, a turfgrass conference will schedule a session called, "Back to Basics." Surprisingly, these sessions are usually jammed. The top-drawer superintendents attend, "just to brush up." Others come to learn the basics that somehow escaped them earlier.

Now, in everyday maintenance, we need to consider the basics. Frills are out. In the energy crunch, we need to remind ourselves that the farmer and food production represent the number one priority. Recreational turf is necessary, but not as critical.

One of the basics for turf is financial support of the entire program, which includes research, teaching and extension. An economy of shortages demands attention to alternatives. Research is essential to the discovery of alternatives that work, but research costs money. Everyone—clubs, firms, associations, individuals—should give financial as well as moral support to this program. In several states, programs are funded through the turfgrass council. Some states have turfgrass foundations. Each is dedicated to providing financial support to their respective state programs.

Teaching is essential to train turfgrass managers in the basics of establishing and maintaining all kinds of turf. We must continue to discover and develop leadership.

Extension is vital to the industry. It is the means whereby discoveries are carried to the field at no additional cost to taxpayers. In many states, the extension service is understaffed and overworked. As more clubs, firms and others join their state councils, there will be more money to encourage hiring additional personnel. Tax funds do not meet the needs.

At one time, research was funded in large measure by grants-in-aid from firms, which had made a product that

needed testing. These firms used the results to help sell their products. This source of funds has nearly dried up. Now, those who hope to benefit must consider supporting research programs or being denied the benefits.

One of the basics in a golf course budget is an item to send the superintendent to two conferences: 1) state or regional and 2) national. There should be included in the budget another standard item, which could be headed, Research and Education. If this item were to receive board approval, it would automatically be renewed each year. What a boost it would be to underfinanced turfgrass programs. But boards of directors usually act on requests from the chairman of the green committee and the superintendent. One has to ask in order to receive.

*Q—Our club would like to participate in support of the turfgrass program in our state, but we don't know where to send our check or how much is our share. Whom do we contact?*

*(Pennsylvania)*

**A—**Your check in the amount of \$100 would be drawn in favor of The Pennsylvania Turfgrass Council and sent to the treasurer, David M. Boyd Jr., Rte. 1, Box 5A, New Wilmington, Pa. 16142. This buys your club a Sustaining Membership in the council and entitles your superintendent to membership and to the quarterly Keynote at no additional cost. The Keynote carries valuable timely information. Clubs in other states would do well to contact their county agent and the extension specialist in turf to learn the details. A call or a note to the agricultural experiment station can accomplish the same purpose.

*Q—We are anticipating a shortage of water for our golf course. There may be enough for only the greens and*

*tees. Is there anything that we can do to prepare for it?* *(New York)*

**A—**I hardly know how to reply, because I do not know anything about your past management practices or the type of turf you have developed. If your fairways are heavy with *Poa annua* we can be quite sure that you will lose much (or all) or it. If bluegrass and fescue are strongly in evidence, you have a chance to survive. Several things will help: 1) thorough soil cultivation to improve rainfall penetration and reduce runoff; 2) heavy liming (if needed) to bring soil pH levels to 6.8 or 7.0 (neutral); 3) get board approval to raise the mowers to about 1½ inches (3.8 cm.), which will permit deeper rooting and, thus, better drought survival; 4) post a notice on the bulletin board that preferred lies are permissible; 5) mow less frequently; 6) consider cutting in (overseeding) seeds of drought-tolerant grasses (fescues, bluegrasses) at the appropriate times; 7) increase the potash content of your fertilizers (sulfate of potash, if available).

*Q—Please tell me the best way to go about getting zoysia established from seed. How much is required per acre? When is the best time to plant it?*

*(Delaware)*

**A—**Twenty pounds of seed per acre is enough to ensure a stand. Early July (start of hot weather) is the most favorable time to plant. A scarifier-seeder is highly recommended to place the seeds in contact with the soil. Pre-germination is highly recommended to start the plants off quickly. Mix the seed with sifted sawdust (equal parts), moisten and pile on a clean, warm cement floor. Turn the pile every day, moisten as needed, until tiny white sprouts begin to emerge. Now blend the lot with a granular ureaform or sewage sludge (equal parts) and seed at once. Adjustment of the seeder will

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be necessary to allow for the diluents (carriers). Do not expect rapid coverage as with hulled bermuda. Zoysia is relatively slow, but it's permanent.

**Q**—If bermudagrass is as drought tolerant as we are led to believe, why is it that so many bermuda fairways are watered so much? (Oklahoma)

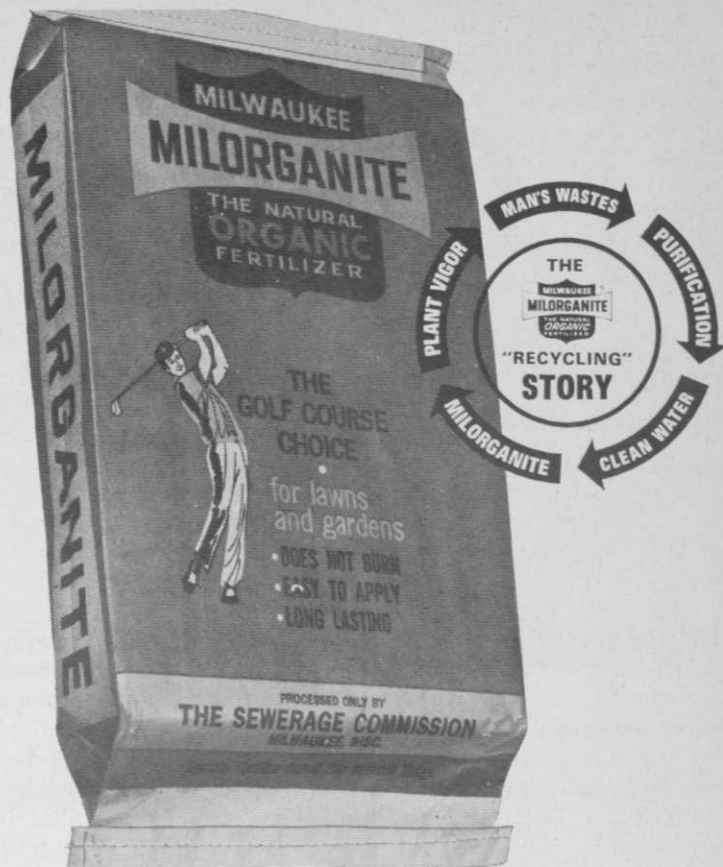
**A**—One reason is appearances. We have built up an image of "green-equals-perfection," which is only partly true. Perfection in fairway turf means smooth, dense, closely-clipped turf that holds up a ball for a true shot. Color is quite secondary to the game of golf. Adequate nitrogen is every bit as important to quality in fairway turf as is water. I've seen bermudagrass turf hold a reasonable green color after 90 days in Texas summer heat. It was well fertilized and retained its playing quality. Twenty-five years ago, I was in Detroit hitting shots from different kinds of fairway turf with Al Watrous and Horton Smith. We agreed that the best controlled shots were hit from dry, firm unwatered patches of red fescue. Good golfers do not like soft lush turf, which lets the ball sink into the grass. It could be that we need to reassess our values and redefine priorities.

**Q**—We hope to establish zoysia fairway turf from seed. Can it be over-seeded with cool season grasses the same as with bermudagrass? (North Carolina)

**A**—Yes, zoysia can be overseeded with a high degree of success. It will be very important to mow closely ( $\frac{3}{4}$  inch or 1.9 to 2.0 cm.) and to cut the cool season seed through the turf into contact with the soil. Every since I saw my first zoysia in 1931, I've noticed that bluegrass acts like a "weed," if one tried to grow pure zoysia turf. What I'm saying is that bluegrass invades naturally. The most conspicuous winter weed in zoysia turf will be wild onion or garlic. □

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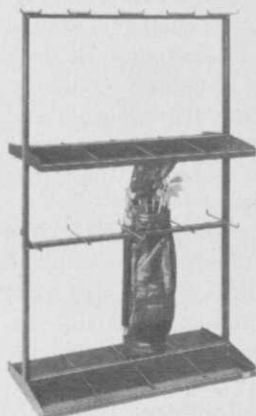


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