

Superintendent skills

By Jim Converse



Jim Converse is one of America's leading botanical artists. His paintings and drawings have appeared in numerous national publications, and his weed and grass identification books have become standard tools of the trade. Jim is far more than a botanical artist, however, with years of

practical turf experience. Before assuming turf management responsibilities at OM Scott & Sons Company, more than 20 years ago, he worked as a golf course superintendent. After tours in Scotts Research and Retail Training areas, Jim was transferred to the ProTurf Division where he headed their training and educational programs. He is currently concentrating his talents in the area of visual communications.

Changes

A wise man recently observed that people born during the year 1948 have lived through more changes in their lifetime than all the world's previous history. That's a rather profound thought, especially when we consider that our earth may be millions of years old. But, when we stop to reflect on these few years it has truly been an era of rapid-fire change. If these times

have taught us one certainty, it's that there are very few absolutes in day to day living. About the time we have comfortably accepted a situation or theory, it has faded and something new has taken its place.

In golf course maintenance we are frequently asked to accept a new idea that goes against a belief that has been ingrained for years. For example, not too many years ago ryegrass was considered to be a weed in turf. Mowers couldn't cut it - they chewed it off! It was unsightly, ugly and to be strictly avoided in all seed mixtures.

But today's improved varieties not only exhibit pleasing color and performance, they also have exceptional cutting qualities. Like other grasses they aren't suited for all purposes, but there are many places where ryegrasses are the right answer for important turf needs and requirements. We've changed our thinking about ryegrasses.

Our early turf fertilizers were anything but predictable and without "watering in" there was almost a guaranteed burn. Today there are many such products compounded in dozens of specific ways to deliver exceptional, predictable results. It would seem that little more could be done with fertilizers, but technology can only promise even more dramatic changes for the future.

The emergence and proliferation of chemical controls for turf problems covered a relatively short period of time. We watched, doubted, evaluated and soon learned to place great dependence on many of these compounds as unequalled problem solvers. They not only enhanced our ability to maintain an excellence in turf, they also increased our prestige and professionalism. Most of all they helped give us a new found sense of security that had been almost impossible to find in the past.

Now we are told that many of these old standby compounds that "really get the job done" are not good for "something", or "someone" and can no longer be used. It's confusing and sometimes difficult to accept, especially when we were so hard to convince in the first place. But, an important point we have learned is that we can somehow manage the change and still manage the turf.

There have been many other impressive changes in golf course maintenance. Turf equipment has moved from a clattering inefficiency to flota-

tion tires, fluid drive, roll bars and all kinds of marvelous engineering "gizmos". Irrigation systems are almost beyond belief, especially when we consider that just a few years ago we scattered more water through leaks than we did through sprinklers.

It would be impossible to touch on every evolution that has occurred in turf maintenance during the past few years. Most of the improvements have been subtle to the casual observer, but extremely impressive and important to the man responsible for the job. If these changes teach us one thing it's that there is no "status Quo". We never reach a point when we have climbed the mountain and all there is left to do is take in the view.

The profession of being a golf course superintendent has always required anticipation, reaction and action. And if it demanded expertise in a wide range of skills in the past, imagine what will be required in the future? The superintendent should reinforce his efforts to take advantage of all the learning tools at his disposal. This means reading and staying abreast of all trade publications and technical documents, attending local and national superintendents association meetings, attending field days and turf conferences, attending seminars and glean any information he can from business people in the trade. He should use these and any other methods he finds available, not just to stay abreast of the times, but to stay ahead of the times.

Turf maintenance in itself and all of the ramifications of managing day to day operations requires an inherent number of skills. In recent years problems of the job have been compounded by an increasing number of government regulations. Whether the regulations are right or wrong, good or bad, has little bearing here. The point is they must be learned, observed and followed. There are laws to protect the environment, laws to protect the worker and other laws that the superintendent must know and enforce.

Yes, there have been a great number of changes in golf course maintenance in just a few, short years. Most of the changes have added vast improvement, but for certain, maintenance is no longer a simple task, void of complexities. If changes are as rapid in the future, we could only offer each superintendent the old coaches admonition and say "Stay loose son! You ain't seen nothin' yet!"

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