The title of this article might lead you to believe that we are asking you how you like to stay informed. Actually, we already did. So for now there’s no need to rack your brain. Just sit back, relax and read on. For the 160 MGCSA members that completed our online needs assessment survey last year, a resounding THANK YOU. The purpose of this article is to summarize the results of this survey and to inform you of how we will utilize this information to best serve you in the future.

**Purpose of the needs assessment survey**

In the area of golf course management, it can be difficult for a person to know what to do when an issue arises, especially if this issue needs to be addressed quickly. Usually while trying to solve a problem, it is helpful to look up the appropriate information, or call upon knowledge one already has. But what about times when that information is difficult to find, or the turf problem is unique and hasn’t previously presented itself? To help stop a lack of know-how and inaccessible information from preventing quick solutions to turfgrass management issues, a survey was conducted last year to determine common turfgrass management practices and problems among survey recipients, as well as preferred methods for learning about and receiving information on turfgrass and lawn care. The results of this study will be used in the future to provide the most useful information in effective and easily accessible ways.

**How the survey was conducted**

The survey was conducted by sending out online questionnaires designed in Qualtrics to those who agreed to participate, and 1,234 people returned completed surveys. The survey was available over the period of January 1st to March 31st, 2013.

Most respondents were homeowners (80%), while the remainder cared for turf in some other facet, such as in their professional life. To be honest, this survey was initially written with homeowners in mind, with the main goal of disseminating low-input lawn care information in the way that they prefer to receive it. With the overwhelming response from golf course managers, this information can be used to help drive our educational programs for you.

**MGCSA member results**

Of the people who completed surveys, 160 (this means you!) stated that they took care of golf course turf. When it came to how golf course managers like to get their information, ‘listening to an expert lecture’ was ranked in the top five choices most often, followed by ‘browsing a website’, ‘reading’, ‘watching a demonstration’, and ‘watching a 3-5 minute video’ (Figure 1). In regard to ways one would stay up to date on future turf information, websites were the most popular choice, followed by newsletters. Upon considering the information presented in a website, the source of information was most often chosen as the most important aspect of the site, followed by the presence of informative text. An additional question asked if there were any practices not previously listed in the survey that the respondent
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would like to learn more about. Golf superintendents wanted to learn more about specific topics, such as drainage issues, growing degrees days, and environmentally friendly practices, like organic products and low-input maintenance.

Further on in the survey, respondents were asked about lawn care products that are widely available at home improvement stores and garden centers. Of the questions on this topic, the answers to one question stood out when compared to the rest. When presented with the statement ‘Advertisements for the products available accurately represent the results I have experienced’, the average of the answers fell somewhere between ‘slightly disagree’ and ‘slightly agree’. This indicates that many golf course superintendents think the products available to homeowners do not always do precisely what they are advertised to do. In particular, when looking through the explanations as to why respondents answered the way they did, there was a general consensus that the products available for homeowner
use are of lower quality and not as effective as the products available to golf course managers, despite that many of these widely available products advertise themselves as being able to, in the words of one respondent, “...make your home lawn look like a golf course”.

Ninety-five percent of golf course managers that responded had in the past attended a lawn care or turfgrass event. Most people had found out about the said event from a newsletter or from an individualized option, such as the MGCSA. In regard to future events, every respondent was interested in attending one, and most saw value in longer rather than shorter events (Figure 2). About a third would prefer to attend an event that was half a day, and another third an event that was a full day. Of the remainder, 22% were in favor of an event lasting from 1-3 hours, 14% an event longer than a full day, and only 4% wished to attend an event that was less than an hour long.

Travel time choices were spread out as well, with 38% willing to travel 30-60 minutes, 28% between one and two hours, 20% more than two hours, and 14% less than a half hour (Figure 3). Not surprisingly, most respondents indicated that they would prefer to attend an event that was held in the morning or afternoon on a weekday during one of the winter months. January and February were the highest

![Time Willing to Dedicate to an Event](image-url)
ranking months for an event. Finally, in regard to payment options, about half of the golf superintendents felt that somewhere between $20 and $50 was a fair price to pay to attend a turfgrass event. 32% were willing to pay somewhere between $51 and $100, while 12% would pay over $100. The remainder (totaling 8%) would either not pay at all for an event or only pay an amount that was less than $20.

A comparison of all results

The largest group of folks who responded to the survey were people who took care of home lawns. When comparing that group to golf course managers, there were some differences that stood out. When both groups were asked about how they wanted to stay up to date on turfgrass or lawn care issues, homeowners answered ‘newsletters’, ‘websites’, and ‘social media’ at a lower rate and ‘garden centers and ‘general media’ at a higher rate than golf superintendents. This is certainly no surprise. The remainder of the questions that asked about turf management practices used by each group were different as well. Whereas most professionals conducted all of the common practices, homeowners were more divided. In particular, homeowners tended to not use insect or disease control, which they indicated was because they did not believe there was a need, they had environmental concerns about the practices, or lacked the knowledge to use those controls. Additionally, homeowners were evenly split between whether they aerated their lawns or not, and when they did not aerate, it was because of a perceived lack of need, time, or knowledge. When asked the question about lawn care topics they would like to learn more about, homeowners were interested in a wider range of topics than golf superintendents, especially about subjects turf professionals may consider basic knowledge.

Homeowners most frequently wanted more information about issues with bare patches or thinning turf, low-input lawn care and organic products, pest issues caused by moles, voles, and Japanese beetles, choosing the correct turfgrass for certain situations, weed and disease control options, and best cultural practices. Regarding turfgrass or lawn management events, 44% of homeowners had heard of a recent event they had attended through the University of Minnesota Extension, but 37% had never attended an event of this nature. This is very different from golf course superintendents, almost all of whom had attended a turfgrass event, and had heard about it from a few different sources.

Over half of homeowners wanted such events to be one to three hours long, 18% preferred half day events, and 12% would attend events that were less than an hour. Golf course superintendents had a different, more even distribution that leaned towards longer events. Homeowners also preferred to travel shorter amounts of time to lawn care events, with 49% willing to travel 30 to 60 minutes, and 39% would travel no more than 30 minutes. This group also would rather attend these events in the morning and afternoon on weekends, or the evening on weekdays, mainly during the months of March and April, and February and May to a lesser extent. The discrepancy between these groups in terms of event timing can likely be explained by work activities, as most superintendents would be attending events during their work...
information reception resulted in answers from both groups that were very similar.

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The discrepancy between these groups in terms of event timing can likely be explained by work activities, as most superintendents would be attending events during their work
hours as part of their professional development, whereas homeowners would likely need to attend events outside of their normal work hours. In terms of payment, homeowners were willing to pay less money for turfgrass events, with 50% only willing to pay up to $20, 29% wanted to pay between $20 and $50, and 15% not willing to pay for an event at all. This makes sense, as golf superintendents would be more likely to be using funds provided by their employer to pay for events and thus willing to pay more money. Additionally, turf management problems may be a less pressing issue to homeowners, as their jobs do not depend on them solving problems in their home lawn.

How we will use this information

It makes sense that there are different groups of people in our community that need and use information about turfgrass and lawn care. Before this survey was conducted it wasn’t clear if there were differences in the type of information various groups of people use and how they like to receive it. The results from the survey indicate similarities and differences between the two groups, and this information can be used to give different groups of people the information they want through the best channels and at the correct time of the year.

Golf superintendents need access to turfgrass information year round, but during the growing season will likely want to access information quickly, perhaps in an online format or through regular newsletters. During the winter, when they have more time, this group clearly wants to receive in-depth information on specialized topics during events such as multi-hour workshops. Given this information we will continue to refine a variety of information in multiple easy-to-access formats during the busier season, and structure the more time-consuming in-person events so they are predominantly scheduled during the winter months for the appropriate price and travel commitment.

Homeowners are interested in basic information about a wide variety of turf-related topics, and like golf superintendents would also be able to use this information year round in an easy-to-access manner. A well designed website can provide relevant turf management information to both groups of people and longer events could be held for homeowners in the early spring, on subjects they were interested in learning more about.

Final thoughts

Thank you again to all the MGCSA members who completed this survey. Without your help, we would never have been able to glean the insight we have about the best ways to deliver the correct information about turfgrass to the different groups of people who need it. With this new knowledge, we will be able to modify and sometimes substantially change our current practices to better meet your future needs and ultimately create more successful and valuable extension programs for you.

Current University of Minnesota Extension Turfgrass Management Resources:
Turfgrass Science Program Website and Blog: www.turf.umn.edu
Extension Turfgrass Management Publications and Interactive Tools: www.extension.umn.edu/turfgrass
Sustainable Urban Landscape Information Series: www.sustland.umn.edu
Yard and Garden News Blog: www.blog.lib.umn.edu/efans/ygnews
Soil Testing Laboratory: www.soiltest.cfans.umn.edu
Plant Disease Clinic: www.pdc.umn.edu

See You at the 2014 GIS National Night Out

Tommy Bahama

It wouldn’t be the same without you
February 5th, 2014
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RESTAURANT & BAR

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