

# Greenkeeping in Canada—Yesterday and Today

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*Toronto Golf Club*

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LOOKING back some twelve to fifteen years ago, greenkeeping in Canada was then in its infancy. Golf courses in existence were somewhat fewer in number than at the present day. Many courses have been built within the past ten years: older courses have been rebuilt and remodelled.

Fashions in golf courses, like fashions in dresses, change very quickly. In the past ten years, golf course construction has made great strides. The older courses have been remodelled in order to bring them up to date. As far as the positions, and designs of the greens and bunkers are concerned, competition has become very keen between clubs, so that committees have been forced to bring their courses up to date for the present day requirements in order to retain the allegiance of their members and to have, as we are led to believe, the last word in golf course construction.

In former days the golf course was, in most cases, under the direct supervision of the pro-

fessional, as a general rule a young man engaged from the British Isles. He struggled along with what little training he had received in greenkeeping and followed out much the same methods he had been accustomed to, which proved very unsatisfactory with such a difference in climatic conditions and soils such as ours.

The methods in those days were apt to generalize too much, and too much inclined to the opinion that what was right to do in one place must needs be right to do in all, irrespective of climate, soil, etc. According to the old order of things, if one form of procedure is a success in one place it must be in another, a closer study of nature and experience, has convinced us of the fallacy of this reasoning. We have long recognized the fact that each green, each tee and fairway is a distinct problem in itself, and often requires individual treatment. To generalize in greenkeeping is to court failure.



10TH GREEN, TORONTO GOLF CLUB, LOOKING FROM THE TEE

Referring back to former days when the art of greenkeeping was in its infancy, one cannot but be struck with the advancement which has been made by the average greenkeeper of today. The whole routine has undergone a change—old methods have been discarded, new improved methods have taken their place. In those days the requirements of the golfing world were far less exacting than at the present day and the efficiency, or rather I should say the want of it, which characterized the greenkeeper of that time has given away to a new order of things. The golfer himself has become better educated to the game of golf, and the profession of keeping the greens has, in late years, become a more scientific study and a test of skill.

It is only necessary to glance at one of our modern well-kept courses to be struck with the advancement, which is being made in every department, of golf course formation and management from the club house to the bunkers, as well as the advancement in the general routine of the work done, not only in golf course construction, but work that has been done in order to beautify the club house and grounds, in planting trees, flowering shrubs, flower beds laid out and kept in good order. Some of this work is being carried out extensively by some of our leading clubs in Canada.

#### New Courses Starting Up

**A**S a general rule when property is purchased for a golf club, unfortunately the soil is nearly always very poor. To start with, before and after its conversion into a golf course it will have received little or no assistance but has been steadily impoverished. A club that has been fortunate enough to procure land that has been well farmed is off to a good start for growing fine grasses desired for our fairways and putting greens.

#### Top Dressing With Compost

**I**N THE early days not enough attention being given to the making up of proper compost for the topdressing of newly built greens, with little or no humus, the greenkeeper found the great handicap of nothing to work with

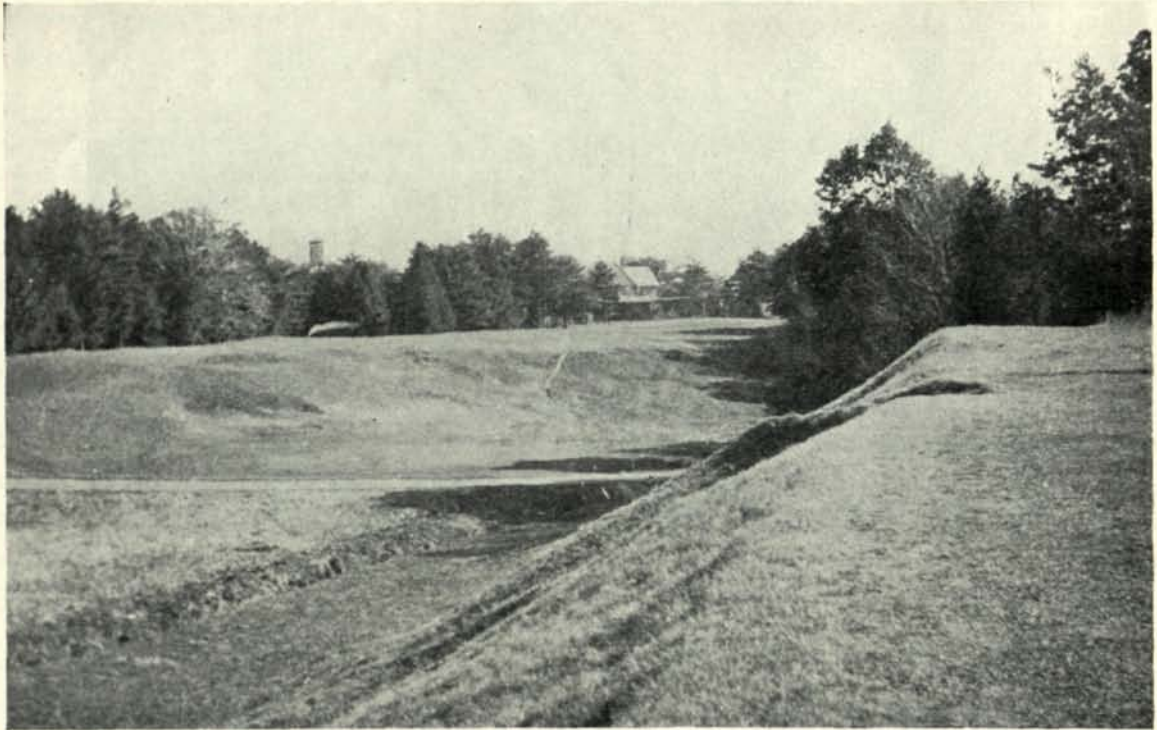
until such times as he could make a compost pile fit to use. He would no doubt use plenty of artificial fertilizers, but that would not put humus in the soil, which is a very important factor in maintaining the fertility of the soil. The up-keep of its humus content and organic matter in the soil has many functions that cannot be performed by other fertilizing substances. It improves the soil textures and better water holding capacity. First class permanent turf can be had only on soils that are well supplied with humus or decayed vegetable matter. The preparing and mixing of compost now forms one of the most important items in greenkeeping to meet with the requirements of a modern green. The dressing and preparing of compost should be carried out in a more scientific manner. One important thing is to make sure that the compost is light enough. To dress a green with anything like a heavy sticky nature is asking for trouble.

As the labour in preparing and the cost of material falls heavily on the finances of any club where the greens are kept in good order, the greatest care must be taken to use only compost or manure which may be expected to give the results best to repay the outlay.

The natural soil of the district must be the prime factor in the choice of what will most benefit the greens. Compost should be made at the very least one year before using. A greenkeeper with forethought enough to keep a good supply of compost on hand will always be an asset to any club. As a rule, the green committee does not pay very much attention to these matters. I have often wondered what our courses would be like if it were not for the man looking ahead and preparing one season for another and were they to change as often as a club's green committee.

#### Golf Course Equipment

**W**E HAVE seen great changes in golf course equipment during the past few years from the old type of the one horse-drawn machine for cutting our fairways, improved later by the three unit triplex machines, to the present day, tractors with the gang mower of five cut-



18TH HOLE, TORONTO GOLF CLUB, LOOKING FROM THE TEE

ting units. Our fairways undoubtedly have improved by being better cut and more often than it was at all possible to do in former days. Greens mowers have improved for closer cutting for our present day needs, while power machines for cutting rough, as well as power putting green mowers are used by a number of clubs at the present time. Compost screens, top dressing machines, sprayers, sprinklers and many other improved implements have been added to the list.

### Rolling Turf

THE heavy roller was very much in use in former days, being used as a remedy for all evils. If a green did not putt true the greenkeeper was instructed to give number so and so a good rolling to true it up. There is no doubt that the proper rolling of a green is a very important point in greenkeeping. Before the evil result from the too frequent use of the heavy roller was recognized there is very little doubt much harm was done by rolling too often and using too heavy a roller; more especially greens on heavy soils require great care in rolling.

There are times when good rolling with a fairly heavy roller will be found very beneficial, especially early spring, after the winter frost leaves the soil loosened up and the surface is very uneven. I would say that in former days more greens were spoilt through the mistake of over-rolling than there was from the want of it. If a green does not putt true it is far better to give it a good topdressing of sharp sand or good light compost screened, and well rubbed in. This will true up the surface and make good putting, far better than any amount of rolling and will do away with the danger of packing or binding the surface.

The moment one walks on a firm green it is very easy to form an opinion from the feel of the turf whether its firmness is due to over-rolling or to the more correct method of the latter. There is nothing harsh about it but it is porous as well as being firm—it is a pleasure to walk on a green of this character, especially under bad weather conditions, as everyone knows a true putting green is the joy of every golfer. To create this condition

in a green it is necessary to topdress and fertilize with regularity.

Rains and constant sprinkling, which are necessary to the growth of grasses tend to wash away the surface of the green, and expose the roots which causes a bumpy condition. The existing condition of a soil can be changed by regular and persistent topdressing, for example a clay soil can be changed somewhat by topdressing with sharp sand. Of course applications that are too heavy will tend to smother and to thin the growth of any grasses. Fertilizing is another thing that requires close observation as to when and how to apply. I am a firm believer that three or four light applications per year are much better than one heavy. No hard or fast rule can be laid down in regard to the amount of fertilizer per green as some greens require more than others. Too heavy an application will have a burning effect which is another point in favour of light applications.

#### Sand is Excellent Dressing

**S**AND is an excellent topdressing, especially as a protection over winter. It has the effect of fining the turf and assisting surface draining. Sand should be sharp.

Greenkeepers of today are making a closer study of the many problems that we have to combat. Competition in golf course maintenance has become more keen. In the old order of things we did not cut our greens so close. Bunkers and teeing grounds were more or less neglected. Today the requirements are much more exacting. We find we have to cut greens closer and almost daily. Teeing grounds have to be kept in good shape by topdressing material and pivots replaced, and markers moved every day, clean towels put out at least three times per week, bunkers raked and groomed daily, and many more details carried out which were not done formerly.

Records have to be kept of all evil pests and their treatment recorded. Greenkeepers know that it is not always our ideas that can be carried out sometimes from financial rea-

sons, sometimes for other causes over which we have no control, such as lack of labour or material. Such being the case we can only do the best we can with what the finances will allow. But in the other case when we are fortunate enough to be under a thoughtful and practical green committee chairman who can and is willing to provide the necessary material and labour to carry out the work providing likewise nature is kind to us, unless we neglect our duty the course of which we are in charge should be a credit to our committee, our members and to ourselves.

#### Seeds

**I**N PRE-WAR days we were fortunate in procuring good, clean seed of the finest putting green mixture and fairway mixture imported by reliable firms, of which today some of our leading courses in Canada stand out very prominent from that original seeding. During the Great War seed could not be obtained, consequently, we had to make

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shift with an inferior quality. Our courses suffered during that period some seven years ago. Bent grass was introduced by the late Dr. Piper whom I had the pleasure of meeting at that time. We started growing creeping bent of the then supposed Washington strain from planting in nursery patches. Some of the clubs procured mixed bent—the pure seed for seeding their greens. Others had to plant their greens from stolons. Not many of the older established courses got beyond having a nursery patch other than using it for patching purposes in greens and fairways.

Our newer courses have creeping bent greens. I am not an advocate for bent greens, believing it is more of a matter of choice for members of any club to decide for themselves whether the bent greens meet with their requirements or whether they go back to the original grass mixture of former days, as the seed can now be obtained. We are not so much subjected to "brown patch" although we have a few cases reported in Canada, about which I am unable to speak much.

**Fertilizers**

**I**N THE early days we used mostly bone meal, sheep manure and tankage mixed with our compost. We have been using ammonia sulphate, with good results mixed with topdressing. The use of fertilizers should in my opinion, be exercised with discretion on the part of the greenkeeper who should not be governed by the salesman. Ammonia sulphate is a highly soluble fertilizer and its continued use will impoverish our soils. Always remember that we need phosphorus and potassium as well. We are in need of a well balanced fertilizer to produce and to hold a good turf.

**Winter Kill**

**O**N ALMOST every course in the spring, when growth has commenced, we see bare patches here and there both on our greens and fairways. From experience we find that the chief cause of the bare patches in the depressions and pockets of the turf, is snow water collecting. The frozen condition of the soil does not allow the water to get away. A

drop in temperature converts it into solid ice continuing thawing and freezing at the end of the winter. We have tried many things such as covering green with brush wood etc. sometimes with success and sometimes without. From my own experience I had better results by topdressing my greens with screened compost put on in the month of December after the golfing is practically over, a light covering not rubbed into the surface which I carried out for a few years with success. This year I have topdressed with good sharp sand applied in the month of November with results yet to follow.

### Organization

**O**CTOBER 1924 we organized our Local Greenkeeper Association. The purposes and objects of the association for the information, instructions for the better education and mutual advantage of its members. Our numbers are few. We enjoy the privilege of visiting the different courses for our monthly meetings during the Summer months. In the winter months we hold our monthly meetings

inside. By doing so we have become better acquainted and we can discuss our different problems and exchange of ideas. It is some two years since we became connected with the National Greenkeepers of America. We look forward to receiving our copy of the NATIONAL GREENKEEPER monthly and also to be present at the Annual Convention and Golf show as well as meeting with our fellow greenkeepers. We probably have not done much in the past to subscribe articles to the magazine, but we hope in the near future to do so.

In conclusion most greenkeepers have recognized the fact that there is much diversity of opinion on the many subjects of greenkeeping. Varying views have frequently been expressed by our best experts at the workmen who are well qualified to give an opinion on any subject. Practical knowledge teaches us to appreciate the fact that what may be quite right to do in one place may be just the reverse in another where the variation in local and climatic conditions makes for a different mode of working essential.

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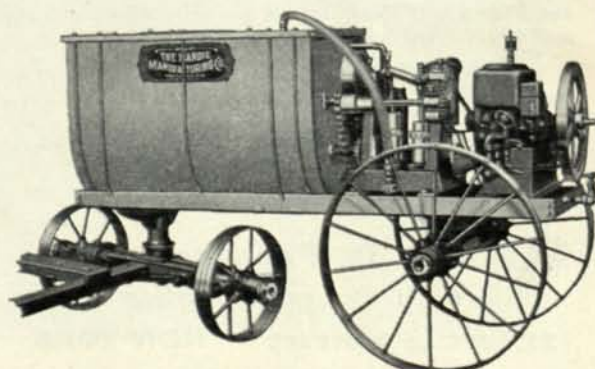
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The rain fall, the character of the soil and subsoil, aspect of the green and many other items must be thoroughly weighed before any given line of action can be followed or advised. These things can only be known to the man on the spot. It is very difficult if not impossible for the man at a distance consequently with no local knowledge to give an opinion of any real value, much less to lay down any hard or fast rule as to what is right and what is wrong. So why not get a place in the sun and resolve that we can make ourselves more valuable to our golf club and adapt nature to our own requirements instead of trying to supersede her. She sometimes seems very hard on greenkeepers but if you study her and adopt her methods she rarely fails to reward. The closer we are in touch with nature, the closer will you be in touch with nature's Author.

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