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Making Compost

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I WILL try and tell you how we put up our compost. The subject of compost is a very much discussed one. Some of our friends who are selling different kind of fertilizers would have us believe that compost is no longer necessary; that all we need to build up our grass is to use their particular kind of fertilizer.

I heard a man not so long ago make the statement, "whoever saw a compost pile in Nature?" I would like to ask whoever in Nature saw grass cut a quarter inch high and then expected it to stand the trampling of three or four hundred men every day. So I would say that if we are going to treat grass so unnaturally in cutting and wearing, we will surely have to use some unnatural process of feeding.

There are many ways of putting up compost. Some very expensive ways and others not so expensive. The expense of putting up compost depends on how you are prepared to handle your compost.

The old system with which most greenkeepers are familiar was the pile system. By this



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Mr. Mendenhall is one of the most experienced and efficient greenkeepers in the Middle West. What he says about compost is worth the consideration of everyone engaged in turf culture.

process a layer of manure was put down and then a layer of soil, then another of manure. This process was continued until the desired amount was in the pile. This was allowed to lay for a season. Then it had to be turned, and let go for another season, after which it was screened and ready for use.

You can readily see that there was a great deal of hand work to this process. We all realize that hand work is expensive. A great deal of the manure used in these piles was burned up instead of being decomposed so it could readily become mixed with the soil as supposed that it would.

Scientists tell us that the air must circulate freely in the soil for the proper growth of the bacteria in the soil that are so necessary for the feeding of the grass. It is readily seen that the

air circulation in a pile of this kind is very limited. Then the sunlight and the rain both enter in the same way as the air, and of course with the same handicap as the air.

Then comes the yard system of making compost. By this system a



COMPOST MACHINE IN OPERATION

fertile piece of ground is selected somewhere on the course, where it is as much out of the way as possible. For an 18-hole course this piece should consist of about two acres of ground. If this is sod land it should be plowed shallow and then thoroughly disced to chop up the sod, covering it with twenty tons of manure per acre. After that it should be plowed to a depth of six or seven inches. If this is done in the spring I would disc it thoroughly and sow to soy beans.

About August 15th you should have a fine green manure crop to turn under. The reason for turning these beans under at this early stage is that they will break down very rapidly at this time. The ground should be disced every two weeks the rest of the fall and a few times during the winter when the ground thaws out and is dry enough to work; then you are ready to screen your compost.

As you can readily see this system leaves your entire area open to the full benefit of the air, sunshine and rain, which are the three things essential to the life and development of the plant food bacteria. The cultivating also gives you a chance to rid your soil of weed seed which would give you trouble on your greens.

AIR ONLY PENETRATES THREE INCHES

SOME of our very helpful agricultural professors who go considerably deeper into these subjects than we greenkeepers, tell us that the air only penetrates sufficiently for the highest development of plant food bacteria, to a depth of about three inches; so I make it a point to not go any deeper than this while taking off my soil for my compost. After my compost is all in the shed for the season, I again plow this area, but not so deep as the year before. It is again sowed to soy beans and the same process followed as the year before. I do not think that you should use the same area more than two seasons as by that time you have the cream well skimmed off.

We try to put up our compost during the month of February providing we have a dry spell of weather at that time, which we usually do. We use an old wheat threshing machine for a compost machine. It is striped of everything except the cylinder and a screen is placed inside where the shakers came out. This machine grinds and screens the compost all in one operation. A man with a team and slip are used to bring in the top two inches of soil from the field.

We have the sand hauled to the machine as it is used. Our compost is mixed about one-half sand, because, having a gumbo soil, it requires a good bit of sand and humus to give it the best water-holding and releasing qualities.

COMPOST IS HOUSED IN SHED

OUR compost is all housed in a portable shed to keep it dry until it is used. The sides of this shed are made in panels four feet wide and fourteen feet long. The roof is made in sections six feet wide and fourteen feet long. This shed is set up as the compost is piled.

First, we set up posts along for each wall. The posts are set six feet apart and tied across the top with a heavy wire to prevent the walls from spreading. The wall panels are placed along inside the rows of posts and the compost is then ricked between the two walls as it is screened. After the pile has been well-rounded up, the sections of roof are set over the pile and tied down to the sides. As the compost is used the sections of shed are taken down and stored for use again next season.

We now have two hundred yards of compost in our shed for the 1931 season at a labor cost of \$123.00. This compost is all ready to put on the greens, all dry and screened through a quarter-inch mesh screen. When it comes time to top-dress we do not have to wait for the compost pile to dry out and this type of covering for the compost pile is very inexpensive both in cost of the shed and getting the compost in the shed.

I know that all the greenkeepers will not agree with what I have written, so let us have their ideas on preparing compost. This is a free argument for more and better ideas along the lines of green-keeping.

Farber Compliments Magazine

Editor, The National Greenkeeper.

It shall be my intention at all times to see what can be done to have our members subscribe to your magazine, as I am a firm believer that it will help accomplish what we are trying to do. Your March number is most instructive, especially the article of Doctor Howard B. Sprague on "Some Water Relations of Turf Plants."

Also, Mr. Doty has a good article on "The Book-keeper and the Greenkeeper." I have made a study of this problem the past four years, having established a yearly budget, with monthly reports of expenditures, which is working satisfactory.

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