

# THE VALUE OF COMPOST

By J. K. CAMPBELL

Links Supervisor, St Andrews, Scotland

*John Campbell, President of the Scottish Golf Greenkeepers Association, discusses one routine task and others which his staff often have to face. These two articles originally appeared in Golf Illustrated and are reprinted by kind permission.*

A GOLF course more often than not is judged by the condition of the greens, and if the putting surfaces are bumpy, the turf soft and soggy, badly pitted with ball marks, the course will, with some justification, be considered poor. There is no good reason why this should be the case.

The ideal conditions to aim at for all the year round are those where the turf is firm, resilient, and with a true putting surface that allows the ball to run smoothly without being deflected by avoidable irregularities.

Normal practice during the autumn and winter months is to spread sharp sand on the greens to keep the turf firm and open textured, and this can be beneficial only if done lightly and the sand well brushed in.

On the other hand it has been found that a too liberal use of sand will inevitably result in a hard layer being built up in the soil, impervious to moisture, and through which grass roots cannot penetrate and so produce a poor thin quality turf.

A proved method of building up good putting surfaces and, perhaps to a lesser extent fairways, demands a sufficient supply of compost, which can be inoffensive and a necessary adjunct to any golf course.

There but few courses lacking in material and compost can be briefly described as a mixture of good top soil, suitable organic material such as well rotted horse manure, grass cuttings, leaf mould, and this mixed with a sharp lime-free sand into a workable mixture.

These materials are usually built in alternate layers of about 4 or 5 inches

thick until a heap of some 6 feet high is reached, after which a period of time should be allowed for settlement and decomposition. The heap should be turned over at least twice during the year and allowed to stand for another 12 months to give adequate time for fermentation and elimination of weeds.

Regular light applications of this material well rubbed in will improve the texture of the soil, imparts humus, help to make the turf drought resistant and gradually build up true and firm surfaces capable of withstanding the wear and tear of the constantly increasing every day golf.

The preparation of suitable compost is often neglected perhaps due to shortage of labour or unavailability of suitable materials, (e.g. sand). Whatever the difficulties, attempt should be made to overcome them as every well-maintained golf course cannot have enough of this material in stock for top-dressing bulking fertilisers, and dealing with divot marks. The nature of compost is both cheap and valuable.

Soft greens, often the result of poor surface drainage, can be improved by more regular mechanical maintenance to assist aeration. Spiking and slit-tining is extremely beneficial and not nearly enough of this is done.

Scarification, which was hard work for the greenkeeping staff when done by hand, is eased by the use of one of several powered machines now available. The gentle combing action of this operation done lightly and frequently is beneficial to the turf particularly if matted and helps to produce firm and true putting surfaces.