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TREES

on the golf course



IF you want to get the best out of something you have to look after it. Whether the object in question is a piece of machinery, a golf green or a tree, neglect maintenance and problems will be stored up for the future.

Don't think, however, that tree maintenance is horrendously complicated and difficult. Trees in the wild grow from seed to maturity perfectly adequately without man. As little interference as possible is more a measure of good maintenance than of uncaring neglect.

By Tony Gentil



A small conifer trying to compete with surrounding vegetation.



"Mindless" vandalism...



...and the "official" variety, where the tree is being strangled by a tie.

THE maintenance of trees on golf courses divides neatly into two elements. Firstly there is the period immediately after planting until the tree becomes established. The second element is the remainder of the tree's life, during which it will develop, mature and decline. Both periods pose their own problems and so I want to consider each separately.

Maintenance up to establishment is in many ways, the most important and critical part of a tree's life. Problems which occur during this stage will grow with the tree and become increasingly expensive and difficult to rectify later.

If you can help a tree get off to a flying start, subsequent maintenance will be minimal. This is the easiest time to carry out maintenance because the trees are relatively small.

Forest transplants and whips should require the least attention and you can include under this heading trees which naturally regenerate from seed.

To trees of these smaller sizes, the main difficulty in becoming established is the competition from surrounding vegetation.

Keep an area of about a square yard clean round the base of each one. You'll find a herbicide is the best method to use, but be careful of spray drift, particularly when working with the smallest trees. If there is any chance of spray drift, fit a hood over the end of the lance.

You might decide to clear excess vegetation prior to spraying by using a strimmer. If you do, make sure that the spinning, nylon

cutting cords don't touch the bark of the trees, or they'll kill them.

An alternative method of suppressing vegetation round the base of trees is to use a mulch. Forest bark or wood chips are becoming increasingly popular as mulches, but a word of caution about forest bark. Make sure that it is partly decomposed before you apply it. Used fresh, forest bark from conifers can give off vapours as it starts to decompose, and these are harmful to some plants.

There is quite a handy idea for a mulch called a "tree-spat". This is a three foot square of roofing felt with a hole of about three inches diameter in the centre. Leading from the hole to one edge of the spat there is a slit, which enables you to position the tree-spat over the root area by sliding it in from ground level. You can buy tree-spats or make them yourself, depending on the resources available.

Self-sown seedlings may grow up in large numbers, perhaps only a few inches apart. As they develop you will need to remove some to avoid over-crowding. Aim initially for one per square yard. When they reach the size of whips they can be thinned again, to perhaps ten feet apart.

Don't worry about pruning forest transplants and whips; basically they don't need any. Occasionally you might have to remove a branch which has become broken, but other than that leave them alone.

I feel sorry for standard trees. Generally they have a very raw deal. Not only do they have to

overcome the trauma of transplanting, but they also have to survive the vandalism which follows.

I'm not talking now about the "mindless" vandalism of the anti-social lout who snaps their heads off, but the "official" vandalism of incompetent neglect by those who are paid to look after trees.

Standard trees are staked after planting and they are tied to the stake by one or more tree ties, depending on the length of stake. I reckon that something like 10% of all standards planted suffer from strangulation by tree ties that are never loosened.

This isn't an error of omission that occurs only on golf courses. You can see the strangled tree in botanic gardens, local authority parks and private gardens everywhere. It is as if once a person has planted, staked, and tied a tree, that's the end of the tree's need for care. The lesson is clear, check all tree ties three or four times during each growing season and loosen them before strangulation lets in.

Other points to watch in the maintenance of standards are:

- 1) To keep the area round the base clear of vegetation until the tree is established.
- 2) To avoid damage to the bark of the lower trunk by use of strimmers and mowers.
- 3) To remove the ties and stake as soon as the tree is windfirm.

The thought of having to look after a tree for the rest of its life can be a bit daunting. It's not a responsibility you can avoid though. Anyone who owns a tree is legally responsible for any problems it causes. If you are a golf course manager, whether you actually own the trees on your course or not, you are by definition responsible for their management.

How do you resolve this dilemma then, of having to look after trees without having an in-depth knowledge and trained staff? The law requires that you be sensible and adopt a responsible attitude.

You need to strike a balance between using your own common sense and calling in experts when something drastic needs to be done.

Maintenance involves keeping a watching brief. Get to know the trees on your course by looking at them every time you walk the course to look at the grass. You'll find a pair of binoculars are a great help for this job. Look for changes in their growth patterns.

For instance are any of them looking a bit thin on top, or are their leaves smaller than usual? These are often signs of problems in the root systems.

Can you see any signs of bracket fungi growing out of trunks or branches? Don't worry about trying to name the fungi, if it is there, you've got problems.

Are there any broken branches hanging in the top of a tree, or dead branches, obvious in the summer from their leaf-lessness.

All these are things which anyone with common sense can spot. Where, then, do you go from here? You have two choices, either call in an expert for a second opinion or to carry out the necessary maintenance yourself.

Unless you have highly skilled and well-equipped staff, leave hair-raising work to specialist contractors. Small jobs such as removing low branches might well be within the capabilities of your staff. A pole-saw is a cheap and highly effective way of removing branches without the operator having to leave terra firma.

If you feel that you need a second opinion about your trees or you want to call in a specialist contractor, it makes sense to use someone who knows what they are doing. The Arboricultural Association has a directory of consultants and contractors, all of whom have been rigorously vetted. You can obtain a copy of the directory from the secretary, Arboricultural Association, Ampfield House, Ampfield, Nr. Romsey, Hants. SO5 9PA.



Damage by a mower



Bracket fungi



A pole saw in action...



...and in close-up



ROYAL HARARE GOLF CLUB

IT IS with great interest that I read my copy of *the Golf Course* when it arrives and see the problems and solutions outlined. I have managed to pick up some very handy hints and have been able to adapt much to our local conditions. Perhaps it would be of interest to have a brief glimpse of some of the problems we have here in the Southern Hemisphere.

PREMIER CLUB

The Royal Harare Golf Club is the premier golf club in the country and is situated very close to the city centre. It is an 18 hole (6,434 metres, S.S. 72) course on flat, deep red clay soil (c.55% clay).

The course is sculpted through a testing mix of indigenous and imported trees to ensure that every

hole requires a separate strategy and it is mature enough to have high trees to ensure that for the pros and other gorillas a driver is not the club to use off every tee.

Being in the sub-tropics Zimbabwe has a seasonal rainfall from November to March and the average received by the course is approximately 900mm per year. Irrigation is therefore a very important part of management as daily temperatures vary from 12-15 C in winter (July) to 25-35 C in summer (January).

Fortunately the course is adjacent to a Government Meteorological station and all the irrigation is scheduled on a Class 'A' evaporation pan. Converted E/E ratios can soar as high as 7,0 during our 'suicide' month (October).

Prior to Independence the greens

were watered with a Flawn-Thomas automatic irrigation system, but with Independence and a lack of foreign exchange, the obtaining of spares and the lack of a servicing facility began to cause problems. The greens are now watered with a 5 cm perforated aluminium pipe system which is manufactured locally, but which has to be arranged manually across the green. Precipitation is measured with individual rain gauges. Fairways are watered with standard Rain-bird 6.5mm sprinkler nozzles. The water is obtained from four boreholes and during the dry season pumping continues day and night, except at weekends.

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ROYAL HARARE GOLF CLUB

traffic of any club in the country, with an average of 110 rounds per day every day of the year bar one. In the last five years only two competitions have been stopped because of very heavy rain and lightning. This puts some quite heavy demands on the greenkeeping staff as there is no 'quiet' period, except Christmas day when the club is closed. Renovation and major structural maintenance has therefore to be done under the feet of the golfers.

The greens are all hand mowed with petrol driven Briggs & Stratton drum mowers. Four machines mow each green twice a day during summer and once a day during winter - when the grass grows it grows with or without fertiliser!

The greens are covered by a large number of grasses, as many as there have been greens committees, but in the main they are either Tiff or a bastardised local cynodon which has crept in over the years.

RESISTANT

At present we are replacing all the greens with Florida which has proved in our climate to be one of the easiest to manage and most resistant to drought, disease and traffic. Grasses such as Tiff and the Bents do not react well under our high temperature conditions and are particularly susceptible to *Drechslera_poa*. Under more temperate conditions this may cause! melting out!. Under our conditions we can lose a whole green in ten days if untreated.

All the fairways are nearly pure Kikuyu grass (*Pennisetum clandestinum*) which grows extremely well if fertilised and well watered, and these are mown with gang mowers twice a week. Ecologically, Kikuyu grass is the best for fairways in this part of the world and eventually takes over the whole course.

CONSTANT PROBLEM

For this reason each grass is

surrounded by a 'cordon sanitaire' of local couch grass which is used as a battle ground to keep the Kikuyu at bay. This is a constant problem and requires a great deal of labour. The rough consists of natural 'veld' grasses which die off in winter and which have to be bush mown in summer to prevent them getting shoulder high.

As mentioned, the main disease is *Drechslera* for which we apply a Sumiscler/Bravo mix fortnightly during the rains and monthly during winter. This mix has been shown to be the best against Dollar spot (*Sclerotinia sp.*) as well and the fortnightly spray application keeps the course free of most fungus diseases.

When using the old watering system we did get a great deal of slime mould, but with the perforated pipe system, this has been eliminated. Ferrous sulphate was found to restrict this and any moss growth in these patches.

On the pest side, we get lawn caterpillar, army worm, red and white mite and, particularly on the fairways, crickets. A rotated spraying of carbaryl and diazinon keeps these under control.

On the weed side, we have little problem in the fairways as a healthy Kikuyu sward keeps out most things. However, on the greens we do get *Poa annua* in winter and under our conditions this can ruin a green in a couple of months. Once established, when our winter is over it can devastate a green. Fortunately, with Florida and the various grasses we have we can spray Kerb herbicide (propyzamide) and this is usually done as a pre-emergent in late March, early April once we start getting cold nights (c. 12-15 C). Other weeds, particularly *Euphorbia prostrata*, oxalis and *Cyperus esculentis*, we control with spot sprayings of MSMA, Ronstar, 2,4-D and MCPA-K salt.

TOP DRESSING

Our greens receive a six weekly

light top dressing of alternately double washed and screened river sand and fumigated screened tobacco scrap or well rotted cow manure compost. Under our conditions and the high temperatures, thatch is not a significant problem. The greens are also verticut just prior to top dressing.

Throughout all our soils we have a very low organic matter content and our problem is keeping some sort of structure to the soil and we rely on the compost to do this.

Under our conditions during summer, dry maize stover ploughed in and left for 60 days to rot down is almost undetectable as organic matter let alone as maize stover. With fine stem grasses it only needs a couple of weeks and all thatch is gone. It is with great envy that we look at your advertisements for slow release fertilisers.

'NON-ESSENTIAL'

On the equipment side we have sufficient, but we can only drool over some of the advertisements in your magazine. At present, equipment is very difficult to obtain as we are a 'non-essential' industry and we take what we can scrounge and borrow. Normally new equipment can be wangled, but spares are almost non-existent. For small things like bearings for motors and mowers we can wait for up to seven months, nozzles for sprayers up to a year, and so on. As an example we have some mowers whose Briggs & Stratton 5HP motors have been working every day for over eight years - so much for planned obsolescence.

At present our course is in peak condition and we are looking forward to hosting the Zimbabwe Open. After a dry start our rains have arrived, so it's all systems go!

**DR. DOUGLAS McClymont IS
CHAIRMAN OF THE GREENS
COMMITTEE OF THE ROYAL
HARARE CLUB IN ZIMBABWE.**

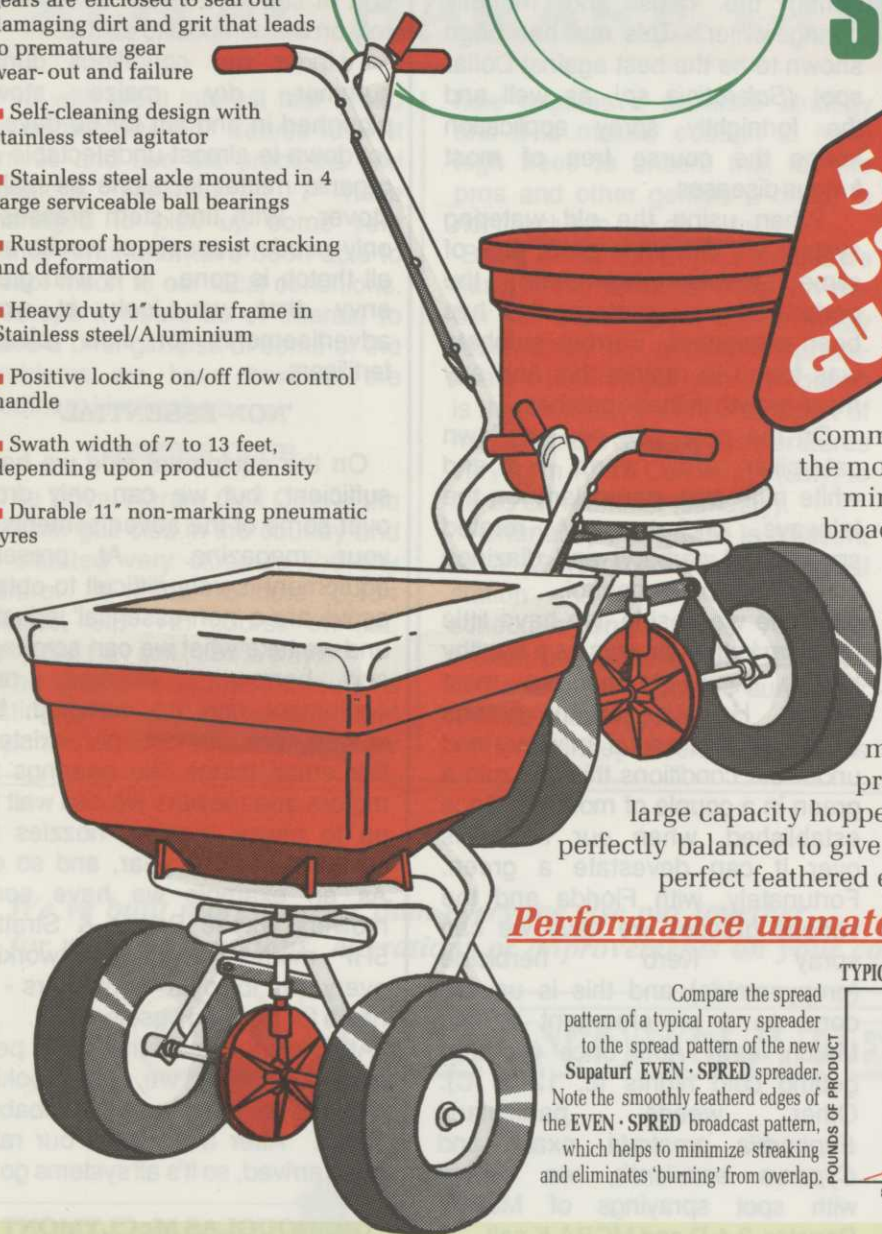
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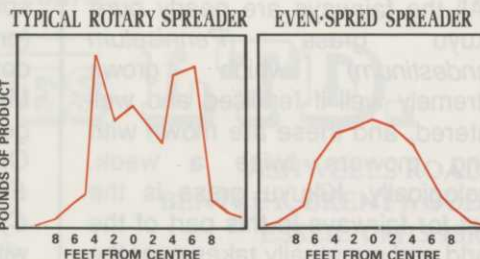
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NOTEBOOK...

Startling! Unbelievable! Dramatic!

WHEN part of a sports ground is virtually restored to life it is hard not to use superlatives. Especially when a problem has existed for years without proper solution and the answer is achieved in three or four weeks.

But it happened at Purley Heath Cricket Club, whose outfield - like many others - is used for hockey during the winter with the inevitable after-effects. The ground lies on original soil of doubtful quality and, as a negative 'bonus', also suffers from the effects of large overhanging trees around the ground which make the groundsman's job almost a nightmare. Colin Claydon saw it both as a problem and challenge and was determined to find a cure.

The result will interest his many colleagues with similar problems.

In April 1987 his ground showed the usual ravages of winter. The outfield, including an area of two hockey pitches, seemed in worse state than usual. Missing divots, excess wear, bare and muddy patches were the order of the day.

Despite reseeding and dressing with a sound all-round fertiliser (Rigby Taylor 9-7-7) there was little sign of good grass growth by early June. Where the turf was overshadowed by large overhanging trees picturesque and photogenic but

friendly to the outfield grass - were large bare, poorly grassed patches defying all attempts to promote vigorous growth.

All this on a ground generally noted for its all-round excellence following four or five years of hard work from the time when Colin inherited pitches, tennis courts and bowling greens in a sorry state with the turf everywhere in poor condition, vulnerable to disease and thatch-ridden.

At the outset Colin took the advice of Frank Brittin, a popular and knowledgeable friend to many groundsman and greenkeepers, and began using seaweed-based products to restore his grass: using Maxidrop as a foliar feed and Alginure Soil Improver with his top dressings. The results on bowling greens and tennis courts (used regularly for prestige county events) have been to restore the turf to a healthy condition with underlying improvement in the soil structure which ensures optimum benefit is derived from irrigation and dressings.

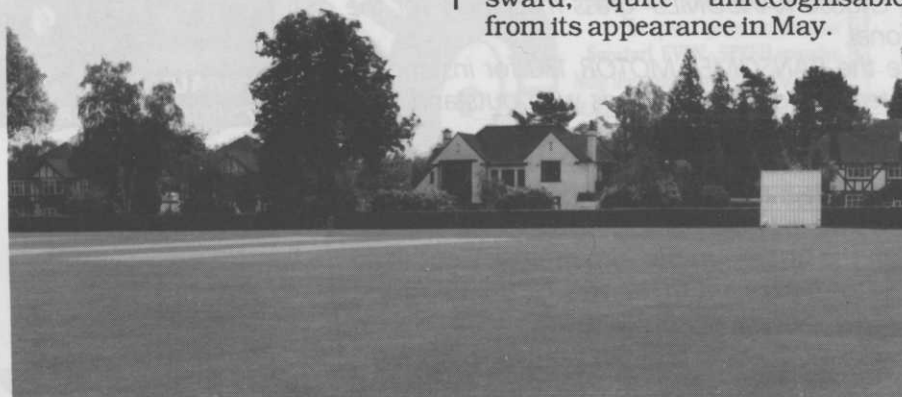
Colin therefore opted for seaweed to tackle his problem outfield areas, but using a new product - Alginure Turf Supplement, a new liquid added to Alginure's range, and the speedy result was better than he had hoped because by the end of June the area was transformed into a rich green sward, quite unrecognisable from its appearance in May.

The result was spectacular but the reason was simple. Alginure Turf Supplement is not a liquid feed, but rather, is rich in essential foods necessary for the initiation and maintenance of vital bacterial and microbial life whose activities create healthy soil conditions.

The concentration of these highly desirable 'goodies' (properly known as polysaccharides) in Alginure Turf Supplement is around 37% - an amount far in excess of that available in other purely organic liquids and it was the introduction into the soil of the natural food for those essential organisms which had the expected result.

Such organisms, encouraged to flourish, carry on the work of improving the organic structure of the soil while aeration is improved, available nutrients are released more easily and conditions are created which benefit growing vegetation.

Colin Claydon has since commenced work in his new post at Shell Sports Ground at Lensbury.



Purley Cricket Club - a view of the ground.

..NOTEBOOK

Turf Care Workshops

THESE very professionally presented days were in the main poorly attended. The original six venues were reduced to four with between 100-200 delegates expected, however the estimate was only reached at Stirling in Scotland. Whether there are now too many of these seminars during the early Autumn or whether it is just apathy, is difficult to judge. There were a sizeable number of delegates who paid but failed to turn up, most of these were apparently from local authorities. They missed several excellent presentations given by representatives of prominent companies in the industry.

The topics covered included research and development of chemicals, slow release fertilisers, organic feeds, irrigation and some aspects of the STRI's research. All the speakers got across their



message, one or two points struck home with the audience which brought forth some searching questions.

The demonstrations by TORO and SISIS were most instructive and Jimmy Kidd as guest speaker gave a beautifully illustrated talk on his time at Gleneagles.

Although the Turf Care Workshops were highly commercial, they were equally

informative and it is to be hoped that they will be staged again next year, when they may attract better support.

A complete and fully illustrated publication featuring the Workshop presentations given by all the participating companies is available at £2.50 inc. p&p, from: TURF CARE WORKSHOPS, FREEPOST, BASILDON, ESSEX. SS16 6BR

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When the small points are being attended to it indicates to members and people like myself that the place is being cared for.

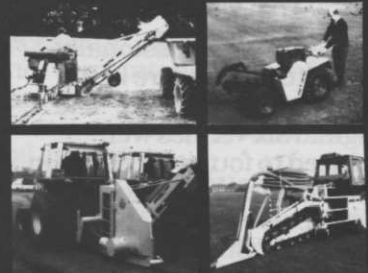
Greenkeeping standards and methods are all about the clubs, the committees of clubs and their responsibilities. They are the paymasters and it is up to the club committees to serve the greenkeeping side so that all the effort is being channelled along the right road and that the money being spent is spent in the right way and not wasted.

It is more difficult to keep a course in good condition now because so much more golf is played. Some 30 years ago I could toddle around every evening of the week, chipping and putting around the greens. Nobody saw me because there was no-one playing the course. It must be a difficult job keeping the place spick and span, and perhaps the secret lies in the number of men and the utilisation of resources.

This is the way I would like to see my ideal course, and I am not talking about a championship course, but a little nine hole course down the road, which would give me great pleasure to play if it were in decent order and all the little points were being taken care of.

ED'S NOTE: No doubt the above will stimulate much discussion and even correspondence. For example Tom Watson perhaps did not know that it had rained for six weeks prior to the Open Championship in 1981!!

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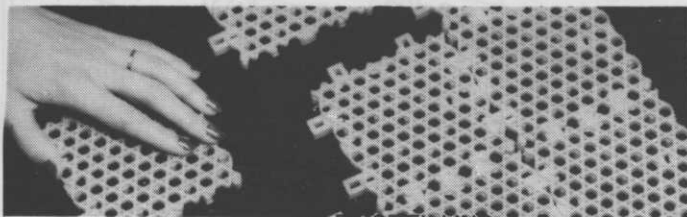


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 The better greens are bent/fescue, But are given praise by golfers few.
 So the greens for colour are far to pale, When they judge by that your sure to fail.
 Then the greens wont hold a ball hit thin, But they never try to get backspin.
 So you're told do this they think they know, And politely you tell them where to go!
 But they shout for water, they shout for feeding, they say that's what our greens are needing,
 Aye! That's the view of the golfing mass, And that's why they play on meadowgrass!*

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