A pre-spring primer

Traditional greenkeeping practices have changed, or to say the least conditions prevailing on golf courses are changing, and this is encouraging greenkeepers to look toward greater scientific application; including the types of fertilisers applied.

Slow release nitrogen fertilisers have been around for quite a while – for example Ureaformaldehyde and Dicyandiamide have been around since the 1920's and organic products with some slow release properties for even longer. So the products themselves are not new, though the way they are used and the results now expected from them most certainly are.

Basic plant growth conditions need temperature and moisture. Moisture we can control to some extent with irrigation and drainage; but temperature is out of mortal control. This means we have to select products that will react to as many growth stimulants as possible.

The organic products, D.C.D. (ICI's Didin), Ureaformaldehyde (Azulon), and the coated products (Sierra's Osmacote) rely on temperature to release the nitrogen to the plant. BASF's Isodur and Crotadur (IBDU and CDU) need both temperature and moisture to release the nitrogen to the plant. Thus it is vital the greenkeeper makes the correct decision in choosing which of the many products to use by deciding which factors are important to him and his course

The principle of slow release nitrogen has always been to limit the availability of nitrogen for leaching, because this is costly, environmentally undesirable, and just plain inefficient. At certain times of the year shortage of water can cause scorch problems, and this also has to be avoided. Irrigation can help but what if you have none? Most golf fairways have no irrigation so winter fertilisation becomes a necessity.

It is in these out of the normal uses that slow release fertilisers excel, but as already indicated the method of release varies from product to product and care needs to be taken in selecting the right one.

As intelligent men – ask for advice from the manufacturers. All companies have a desire to sell their products with an ultimate aim to secure long–term business. It is in their interests to ensure the customer gets the results he expects.

The slow release manufacturers have all been around for a long time with products that are both cost and application effective. Theirs is no double–glazing type industry, for it is the long–term interests of the market and the demands made upon it that is uppermost in their minds. Every golf course is different, often with big variances across individual courses and when the changes in climate – from year to year, or even day to day – are taken into account there is a place for virtually every product somewhere.

By asking for help from the manufacturer, the greenkeeper can make a measured decision which ultimately benefits everyone, even the golfer, providing he gives the greenkeeper a chance!

Plants need nutrients – thirteen in total – plus light, warmth, water and air if they are to survive. Slow release nitrogen can help supply one of the major nutrients efficiently and economically but care must be taken to ensure the correct product is used – make certain you get it right.

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