

Spring: in the air and on the greens

The two courses of The Berkshire were built on 460 acres of open heathland in 1928, the architectural creation of W H Fowler, Harry Colt and Tom Simpson. Since that time there have been few alterations save those made by nature, with this shown as an abundance of trees lining the fairways and surrounding the majority of tees and greens. These are mostly Pine, Silver Birch and Sweet Chestnut, 90% of which are nature's own planting.

These may make the courses look attractive but bring problems such as loss of heather, lack of air-flow around greens and tees and the creation of shade. In addition there are many roots which have encroached upon the course.

In this part of the county the season for visiting parties begins in March and lasts until mid November. We are still mowing greens three times a week in November and cut greens, tees and surrounds weekly until January.

Air-flow restriction around greens means that with mild weather we suffer from fusarium patch. This makes me very careful about top dressing, for if they are smothered and a disease attack occurs the scars may still be visible well into May.

It is worth remembering that soil temperatures begin dropping in September and can remain low, certainly until February or even March. Grass is no different from other plant life and has its dormant period. This period comes – yes, you've guessed it – right at the start of spring.

Golfers have no consideration for soil temperatures and think that as spring begins the grass should begin to grow. They do not understand the thinking behind our programme and often a visitor, when confronted by a working party, will ask 'do you have to do that today, can't it wait until tomorrow'? How nice it would be if golfers had a dormant period to coincide with nature!

Having made my excuses, how do we tackle our spring programme? My answer is with great care. It could be disastrous to

force growth and patience must be the watchword, together with gentle assistance given to nature's own development.

Greens aeration is still the most important task, but only if ground and weather conditions permit. Deep slitting 6" – 8" until March and light verti-cutting instead of mowing is important, as is sweeping by hand with birch brooms.

We still have thatch, some greens worse than others, with this attributed mainly to poor drainage. Our main tasks are to scarify, hollow tine and brush a top dressing of 80% sand 20% soil before overseeding with fescue and bent, brushing at this time of year by hand. No further deep aeration is done until a further month has passed other than occasional 3" slits.

Our programme starts early in March with the hope that our greens will be in good order by May first when the Berkshire Trophy, a prestigious 72 hole amateur event over two days, takes place. My heart goes out to any greenkeeper who stages a professional tournament at this time of the year.

March also sees the start of priming the automatic watering system. I like to be fully operational by mid March so that any faults can be put right, for I have found that it can take two months for major faults to be rectified, indeed before someone even comes to take a look!

By April the greens need just a little reminder that they should be waking up and over the past years I have treated mine with 2 oz per sq yard of lawn sand. Confident that the watering system is O.K. I will at no time let my greens dry out for the last thing they need is stress. I am of the opinion that a little moisture now can save a lot of heartache and I water by hand, avoiding flooding.

May is the time I think of applying fertiliser – 8% organic – and just before application I like to spike to make sure some of it reaches the soil. A fortnight later, just like magic, the sward starts to grow and fill in. Thereafter it's a cut every day, verticutting and grooming. I ask myself, 'is it the fertiliser?' but am sure that although the rising temperature is making the fertiliser react as it should, the real secret lies in the work carried out in autumn and early spring.

I treat my tees in a similar fashion to greens but fairways demand different treatment. Two dry summers has left them far from their best and being heathland we have the problem of an overlay of organic matter, due mainly to lack of aeration over the years. My order of the day is aerate, aerate and, when I think I've done it enough, aerate again. At the moment we are spooning, which is a form of hollow tine. This year we plan to overseed and apply a pre-seed fertiliser. The task order is aerate, light harrow, light scarify, sweep, fertilise, seed after two weeks, spray with seaweed, sit back and watch it grow! Weather permitting these tasks will be complete before March ends.

Another problem we have suffered is that of chafer grubs and leatherjackets. Some areas are soft as the grubs have disturbed the soil below the surface. We plan to put a Cambridge roller over them for, believe it or not, we stand a better chance of killing chafer grubs by the roller weight than by use of pesticides. Of course, this cannot start until the grubs surface from hibernation. Whatever the spring programme you may use I wish you all perfect weather conditions and good greenkeeping.



When 'Greenkeeper International' asked Bob Moreton, (pictured), Head Greenkeeper at The Berkshire, to write about his individual Spring Turf Maintenance Programme, we were surprised to learn that in Bob's eight year reign, despite the luxury of having 36 holes, both Red and Blue courses have remained in constant year round play. Never closed (save for snow) and never having temporary greens imposed on its members, The Berkshire, it seems, thrives on hard work. Bob Moreton's spring programme is therefore one where, given good fortune, the ravages of winter and voracious play may once again be restored

FAIRWAY THATCH! THE PROBLEM

- SOFT SPONGY TURF
- POOR ROOT DEVELOPMENT
- MOSS INVASION
- LARGE DIVOTS



- POOR SURFACE DRAINAGE
- LOW DISEASE RESISTANCE
- POOR UTILISATION OF CHEMICALS
- INSECT INFESTATION

THE SOLUTION

TURFMECH FAIRWAY THATCH REMOVAL SERVICE. Turfmech offer the unique nationwide service to raise the standards of your turf by removing thatch accumulation with high capacity scarifying and vacuum equipment. Removal of this dead growth promotes the main desirable characteristics in the form of smoothness, grass density, uniformity and being firm yet resilient to the well struck shot. If your course demands a great deal from its turf — look at the benefits of fairway scarification.

SURFACE AERATION

The thatch layer acts as a sponge holding water and impeding surface drainage. Nothing works more economically than scarifying to aerate the surface to encourage healthy root growth giving a stronger, more durable turf and stimulating the finer grasses — fescue and bent.

DIVOTS

A thatchy, soft, spongy turf is associated with large divots. Removal of this thatch produces a firmer surface producing smaller divots.

CHEMICAL UTILISATION

Many pesticide and fertiliser applications are rendered only partially effective due to the organic layer made up of thatch. Chemical applications can be reduced, or even cut out completely once the thatch has been removed, stimulating the natural ability of the turf to fight off infection.

MOSS

Moss thrives on the spongy, wet layer of thatch. Remove the thatch and eliminate the environment it thrives on.

PLAYING SURFACE

Scarified, vertical and dense growth gives the perfect consistent surface to play from. With Turfmech's help you can look forward to good looking fairways that will give the performance you demand and the quality your golfers prefer.

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