

# A blending of the seasons

**N**ovember – dark mornings, frozen locks, flat batteries, solid white ground, numb feet, wet gloves, diesel soaked fires, steaming trousers, grey gloom, dirty oil drums with thin ice floating on top, cold, bright moon shining through the bare trees.

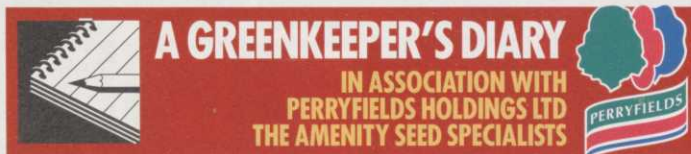
Is my mind playing tricks or were Novembers really like that? I can recall one when it was impossible to move the hole for three weeks but now it seems that I am unlucky if a frost lasts more than three hours. On checking my 1994 and 1995 diaries I find no mention of temporary greens. Instead it reads mowing fairways once a week, 14mm. Fairways! – November! – 14mm! I remember when my gang mowers used to go down to the council yard in October and would not be seen again until April. It seems that the seasons no longer obey their cosmic laws. They have not so much shifted as become fuzzy at the edges. It is difficult to tell where one starts and another begins. Autumn could last well past Christmas and spring can simply not happen at all.

So, what about November this year? The only thing for certain is that I will have a plan and I will have a contingency plan, for who can tell?

## ROUTINE MAINTENANCE

The single most important operation I do all year is spray for worms. On our ground it is essential. I will spray Carben-dazim to greens, tees surrounds and walk routes. Worst fairways will also be treated. I try to do this as late as possible so that one dose will last all winter and so be more cost effective. Any areas that are heavily infested are sprayed earlier and so may require another hit. When the costs for worm killing were prohibitive I used to spray one run around each green, the walk routes and the winter tees and greens. Since doing one run only up the middle of a worm ridden fairway I now have no trouble getting the necessary funding.

Aeration in November consists entirely of slitting. I do all areas as often as I can which is never as often as I would like nor is it ever enough. I use nine inch knife tines on fairways, walk routes, tees and approaches, six inch knife tines on greens. I prefer these tines as they leave comparatively small surface slit yet open up much more area underground for gaseous exchange, drainage and root development. If ground conditions restrict aeration I concentrate all efforts on walk routes. I would rather do these three times than the fairways once so targeting the slitting on the most compacted ground.



Troublesome diseases are usually dealt with by using a full dose rate of Carben-dazim which means that those greens treated get their worm killing for free. Should Take-All or Anthracnose threaten I dash for the Chlorothalonil which does seem to have some suppressing effect. I once tried to tough it out with Anthracnose and refused to spray. It was like sparing with Mike Tyson – a brave but painful experience not to be recommended.

As you would expect mowing heights on all areas are now a few mms above summer levels with one exception of green surrounds. Varying growth rates of different species in winter can leave them scruffy if left to their own devices so I cut down to 25mm to leave a more open, even and tidy surface during the winter.

One of the most important jobs at this time of year is traffic management. I ban all heavy vehicles from the course when the ground conditions dictate. It is not a good idea to trundle tractors about when you are about to announce the first trolley ban of the year. I have tried various methods to guide golfers over different routes; post and rope, post and chain, hoops and signs of all descriptions but nothing works as well as the humble white plastic strip. It does not rust, rot nor need painting and does not interfere with maintenance operations. It is not obtrusive on the eye and best of all it actually works.

Above ground items are invariably moved by golfers thus leaving a gap for all to trample through. The plastic strip is not movable and seems to throw up an invisible wall which is powerful enough to overcome the physiology of the golfer. I put 30cm strips at three metre spacings right across the front and up both sides of each green to push traffic wider than the normal summer route.

## PRESENTATION

Without the pressure of all out mowing, course presentation takes a high priority. Bunkers are kept edged,

paths hoed and trimmed up. All areas are brushed, blown and raked free of leaves. I tour the course to check the condition of course furniture. This immediately improves the look of the course and hurries up the process of replacement. Any unsightly areas which are due for repair that winter I mark GUR straight away. This has the effect of turning a scruffy cause for complaint into an ongoing upgrading of course standards.

I apply soluble iron at 14 to 18 kg/ha to greens, approaches fairways and tees. This helps improve winter colour while aiding the fight against disease and worms. I try to hand mow the greens at least once a week to present well during the winter months. After a dose of iron I might double hand mow the putting green and first tee or choose a short fairway and double cut with the tee triple, hand mow the tee and the green stripe up the rough with a chain harrow or brush.

The idea behind this short lived Augusta syndrome on one or two holes is not to show that we can stripe with the best of them or to improve turf conditions nor even to try to increase resources so that we could achieve this all year round. I do it to show members that we can be plain one day and stripy the next but turf conditions have not changed.

No matter how much I dislike the superficial nature of striping I have to admit there is something undeniably alluring about it. However it can so easily be flatter to deceive. Having demonstrated this fact to golfers I hope that they will be more understanding of the need to produce quality year round surfaces and less enamoured by here today gone tomorrow stripes.

## COURSE DEVELOPMENT

There is always a progressive construction programme to improve the facilities offered by the club. Having just read Bob Maibusch's article for October our improvements seem modest in the extreme but I suspect

they are more in line with the average club over here. I intend to refurbish those greenside bunker faces which have suffered in the past two very dry years. I will dig out and completely rebuild the faces so that any sand build up is removed and the finished bunkers move back from the greens to leave a wider traffic route for mowers between bunker and green.

Two or three tees which have had add-ons over the years will be lifted, cultivated and re-turfed to provide a level stance. I use big roll turf for all but the smallest jobs. The time saved by this considerable and will be put to good use installing paths as necessary and carrying out some small scale tree planting schemes. There will be hopefully be some time to move tee irrigation from the middles to the sides of some tees as part of an upgrading scheme.

## MANAGEMENT

As the manager I will be busily communicating with the Club and members at all opportunities. I will be publishing Course News updates and there is a message on the answer phone and notices by the 1st tee every day to give news about the course, temporary greens, trolley bans and tee bookings. There is also a monthly report to the committee which is circulated to all the staff so they too are kept informed of the business of the club.

Like all Course Managers I know that my staff are my biggest asset. November is the month I hold our annual appraisal interviews where we discuss individually their aspirations and review their agreed development programme. Of all the meetings I attend during the year these are the most important. A great deal of time and resources goes into preparation for and the delivery of outcomes of these interviews but the results are well worth it and I recommend them to all.

November of course means bonfires. I like nothing more than to stack up accumulated rubbish both physical and metaphorical and erase it from memory. A good clear out will make room for a more ordered and tidy approach and allow the mind to concentrate on a positive attitude to the future. Just around the corner is another year and everything is possible.



## NOVEMBER

BY KERRAN DALY

MGC

Salisbury and

South Wilts GC