

Gary Grigg, Master Greenkeeper and past President of the Golf Course Superintendents of America, describes work at Royal Poincianas, Florida, during the month of May.

May in Florida


The month of May is our busiest month in terms of maintenance operations. Perhaps I should visit a little about our club, our turfgrasses and our area of the United States before telling you what our operations are in May.

Royal Poincianas is an equity owned 36 hole facility with 600 regular golfing members. We have 440 acres of land with no development anywhere on the property. 300 acres is what I consider golf course. It is typical Florida in it's flora with palms, slash pines and cypress the dominate trees. It has a wide diverse amount of native fauna also. We have 75 acres of water in 10 different lakes, as well as two streams.


Of the 300 acres of golf, 160 are irrigated turfgrasses. The course was built in 1968-69 and originally planted to Ormond Bermuda grass with native soil greens of Tifgreen or 328 Bermuda grass. The course was reconstructed and upgraded in 1995-96. During this period the greens were rebuilt to USGA specifications and re-grassed with Tifdwarf, a superior putting surface to the older 328. Tees and most of the fairways were re-grassed to Tifway or 419 Bermuda grass. We currently have a mix of the new 419 and the older Ormond, with plans to kill out the Ormond and replant to 419 so the fairways are uniform.

Our golf course exists as a second club for mostly retired members who live in the northern states and come to Florida to live as part year residences during the winter months. Most of our members belong to the best clubs in their resident cities up north. Our golf season gets underway in mid-October and comes to an end by May 1st.

Our climate coincides with the golf season. It begins to cool down in the middle of October to below 90 degrees F in the days and the humidity begins to lower as the rainy season comes to an end. The dry season gets underway in November and the temperature and humidity stay nice until the end of April. May again finds us over the 90 degree F mark, but it is hot and dry until July when the rains begin. We get an annual average rainfall of 65 inches of rain, with 55 inches of that in the rain season of July through September. In 1995 dur-




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ing reconstruction of the golf courses we received over 100 inches of rain. We can also have drier than normal conditions some years, and 1996 was one of those years.

The good news is that Bermuda grass loves hot, humid conditions and grows rapidly during the summer season so that we have regenerated a good playing turf



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by the golf season in October. During the cooler, drier golf season we are very busy and most of our members like to ride golf cars, due to their age. Bermuda grass gets worn down from the intense traffic and does not regenerate well in the cooler months. Naples Florida is below the general frost line and we do not overseed the Bermuda grass in the winter months to cool season grasses as some clubs in the northern areas of the Bermuda grass zone do.

We spend the golf season keeping the course in excellent conditions and the summer months getting ready for the next golf season. May and June become the two months when we have little play, good growing conditions, but are not into the rainy season yet. As you can guess these are very busy months for our crew. My year around staff is 42 for both golf and grounds. Besides myself I have two assistants, one on each course, an administrative

assistant in the office, a irrigation technician on each course, three material applications personnel, our grounds staff is four, we have three in the shop and eleven labours on each course. We also sub-contract out such things as pruning our 8,000 plus trees and aquatic weed control on our 75 acres of lakes.

In early May we fertilise every thing to get a surge of growth so that our turf will recover faster from our intense practices. The first Monday after Mothers Day in early May we totally verticut all the turfgrass and double sweep the thatch cuttings up and haul them to a site for burning. When I say we verticut, we remove all the grass and thatch all the way to the dirt. We then topdress the greens and tees and topdressing mix of 85% sand and 15% peat moss and we heavy topdress the fairways with straight sand. Heavy topdressing of the fairways requires 2,000 tons of sand. We hire out the verticutting and sweeping to an outside contractor who brings in around 6 verticutting-cutters and 8 sweepers. The entire operation for all 36 holes takes only one day, daylight to dark. We topdress with our own crew. Greens and tees take only a day but fairways take a week to ten days to do both golf courses. We use a Terra Topper on the greens, Toro brush units on the tees and a Tycrop 4 cu/yd fairway spinner unit on the fairways. It takes about two weeks for the Bermuda grass to recover and once again to be a good playing surface.

As a side note we aerify all fairways later in the summer with 3/4 inch tines and again topdress heavy with sand and drag it into the aerifier holes. Greens and tees are also aerified in late May and again in late September.

It is absolutely essential that we dethatch once per year. Bermuda grass is very aggressive with its stolons and the consequences of not dethatching will lead to declining health of the turf due to the excessive thatch layer which harbours insects, disease and

stops water penetration into the soil. Topdressing fairways however is an option not too many superintendents perform, due to the cost. We feel here at Royal Poinciana that it leads to the outstanding playing surface we produce for our fairways.

Also in May, after topdressing we broadcast Ronstar herbicide for summer weedgrass control. Crabgrasses, both soft and hard, are major problems in our area and pre-emergence control is a must. The herbicide you use however is a choice. The hot weather of May also brings a major hatch of mole crickets our number one problem insect and we begin a never ending battle with them that lasts all season but is less severe in the cooler months. Sod web worms also become a major problem, along with army worms and grubs, all must be controlled on a regular basis. Most of our disease pressure of the season also occurs with summer as most diseases of Bermuda grass are summer problems.

Towards the end of May when everything has recovered and is growing fast we begin a program of slowing down the growth so we can handle mowing the turf during the rainy season, when we have a hard time getting on the courses to mow. That program consists of holding back fertilisation and a monthly application of the growth regulator Primo. We treat fairways with 8 oz Primo/acre once a month through to October. We treat greens and tees with 2 oz Primo per acre every two weeks through October. The Primo allows us to raise the height of cut on the greens and still have reasonable speed. The Primo also makes the turf denser. The higher height of cut and increased density keeps the intense sunlight off the soil and reduces an algae problem we encounter during the hot humid months of summer. Algae... now there is a real problem on sand based greens. My e-mail is ggrigg@gate.net for those of you who can help me on this one.

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