

Chemical analysis results are just part of a bigger picture

Jim Arthur, in his letter (*Greenkeeper International*, November) correctly drew attention to over-fertilisation of golf greens and the dangers of uninformed soil chemical analysis. In medicine it is often said that "a little knowledge is a dangerous thing". This is also true in the case of phosphate analysis where there are two main techniques in use by laboratories which both give "correct" results but whose figures often bear little relation to one another. The interpretation of such results therefore depends on having the knowledge of the analytical technique used and its implications. Part of the role of Agronomists is to help Greenkeepers through such traps in what is becoming an increasingly technical profession.

As I am quoted by Jim Arthur as saying that STRI no longer undertakes routine analysis of soil samples as it tells us nothing, I feel that this should be set in context as the impression is created that analysis is never worthwhile, which is incorrect.

The key word in the sentence quoted is "routine". At one time many clubs with soil-based greens having adequate nutrient content and stable pH sent samples of all 18 greens to STRI each year for "routine analysis". In such cases the results told us nothing about management of the greens that we did not know already. However, this does not preclude soil analysis in problematic situations or on sand-based greens as Jim Arthur accepts. For example, an Agronomist visiting a Club for the first time may need a baseline soil analysis for future reference or to reassure the Club that the potassium and phosphate are already in abundance and that nitrogen-only fertiliser is needed. High sand content greens need constant monitoring in order to prevent violent fluctuations, especially in pH which is sensitive to nitrogen source and rate. So there may be a variety of situations in which soil chemical analysis is appropriate, indeed Jim Arthur himself used to send samples to STRI for analysis from time to time.

Therefore, the message is that for Greenkeepers and Agronomists,

chemical analysis results are just part of a much bigger picture. Fertiliser companies are trying to provide better products for Greenkeepers with commercial gain in mind and who can blame them for offering soil analysis as an additional service, gimmick or no! But it is incumbent on greenkeepers to ask difficult questions about analysis methods and their implications. If in doubt they should have samples tested by an independent laboratory and seek the advice of an Agronomist who can place the analysis results in the broader context.

Dr P M Canaway
Chief Executive
STRI

Restoration help wanted

I write to enquire whether you might be able to help my son and I. My son, 13, is a keen engineering enthusiast and we are currently involved in the restoration of the engine from a piece of obsolete green keeping equipment kindly given to us by Hamish Brough, the greenkeeper at Broomieknowe Golf Course in Bonnyrigg, Midlothian.

The machine is a Ransomes Overgreen dating from the 1950s. The engine is running but is unfortunately missing one or two parts which we would like to obtain.

We have tried our local lawn mower specialists but without success. I wonder if anyone who reads this letter might know of an old machine lying at the back of some shed on a golf course somewhere.

If anyone can help they may contact us at the telephone numbers.

Thank you.
William D Hendry
Bonnyrigg, Midlothian
Tel: 0131 663 1785 or 0410 764 475
or Fax: 0131 660 9671

Fringe benefits

The recent article about Valderama (September issue) was quite informative and does, of course, bring about a reaction or two.

Two remarks by Mr Patino in particular struck me, one about the professional nature of the greenkeeping business and the second about Pencross.

The comparison of the approach towards the Golf Course Superintendents in the US and the Course Manager elsewhere shows yet again, unfortunately, that the latter has not yet made much progress, so far at least, on this side of the Atlantic. Clubs in Europe have still not got the important message that greenkeeping should be, and has to be, regarded as a highly professional and well respected profession. As soon as the overall attitude towards greenkeeping staff changes for the better, the general atmosphere and, therefore the level of maintenance of golf courses, will improve.

There is definitely a genuine relationship between the two. It is not magic – the nature of the game is common sense and respect. Greenkeeping staff are not on golf courses to be treated like clay pigeons to be shot at. They are there to do a very dedicated, professional and highly important job.

The end of the century is coming up fast. Now is the time to become really sensible about this much discussed subject. It is not too late yet to treat it in a well mannered and mature way. A new era within greenkeeping will hopefully make a good start into the new millennium.

On the matter of Pencross. This wonderful grass has kept many people awake, especially at night time over the years.

I do agree with Mr Patino when he remarks about the side-effects of this grass.

There are still people who wish to simply copy pictures they either see on TV or in reality at certain "dream courses".

There is no secret that in a country not far from the UK excellent greens have been produced without the need to use a grass like Pencross.

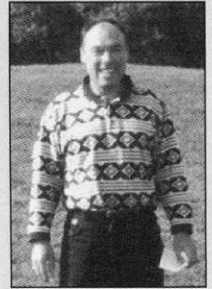
There is absolutely no need to choose to go the hard way in Europe. We definitely can live without Pencross very happily.

Frederick Ten Hage
The Netherlands

ASSISTANT GREENKEEPER

Profile

Usually the spotlight falls on the Course Manager or Head Greenkeeper at a Club. Now it is the turn of those whose work often goes unheralded to star...



Name: **Steve Panting**
Club: **Thornbury GC**
Position: **Student Assistant Greenkeeper**
Age: **41**

1. How long have you been a greenkeeper?

Two years

2. What education are you currently undertaking?

HND Golf Course Management and NVQ 1+2

3. Which one task do you most enjoy doing?

Mowing Tees

4. Which one task do you most dislike doing?

None

5. What job other than greenkeeping might you have ended up doing?

Prior to becoming a greenkeeper I was a qualified nurse

6. Who has been the biggest influence on your career?

Robin Greaves, Head Greenkeeper Thornbury GC

7. What would you do to improve the life of a greenkeeper?

Improve recognition of the greenkeeper's knowledge and skills and improve facilities (mess room etc)

8. What are your hobbies?

Golf, reading, gardening and football

9. What do you get out of BIGGA?

Education on the art of greenkeeping

10. What do you hope to be doing in 10 years time?

Head Greenkeeper