

YOUR LETTERS ARE REQUESTED!

Send to: Scott MacCallum, Editor, Greenkeeper International, BIGGA HOUSE,
Aldwark, Alne, York YO61 1UF, or email them to: scott@bigga.co.uk

Appalling

The editorial decision to publish the article "Girl Power" in an attempt to be amusing is appalling. If you need telling the reasons why then in the words of the Editor albeit for a different subject, "The long term consequences should be of concern to everyone" in the greenkeeping profession.

Malcolm Searle,
Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk

Making the Case for Bio Stimulants

I am writing with regard to the article written by Bob Taylor of the STRI about what does the future hold in the October issue. The STRI trial with bio stimulants did not show positive results but I think greenkeepers might like to know of my experience.

I have been Course Manager at the Royal Automobile Club for 26 years and we have always had problems with root growth even though analysis shows the soil to be good for grass.

Frequent aeration did not seem to help. Last autumn we started to get problems with grass cover which was made worse by continuous winter play.

After discussing the options with our consultant we started a programme of adding mycorrhizae and soil microbes and reducing other chemical use. This September we started to apply compost tea brewed in a Symbio Xtractor to increase fungi, protozoa and beneficial nematodes in the soil.

It took several months for real improvements to show but now the rootzone has changed colour from grey to light brown and smells healthy. We now have roots going through the rootzone into the clay, grass cover is superb, fertilisers last much longer and we have reduced our water and fungicide use.

From what I have seen adding microbes and using compost tea with good greenkeeping practice is part of the future.

Bob Wiles, Course Manager, The Royal Automobile Club, Epsom

Bob Taylor Replies...

The article on Organic Products-What's the Hype About, published in the October edition of Greenkeeper International was always going to generate a predictable response particularly from those with a vested interest in the manufacture and sale of these products. If the article is seen to be out of date and erroneous it is only so as a result of a lack of available independent meaningful data which we at the STRI have requested repeatedly to back up the claims being made. However, Novozymes are currently having trial work conducted on new products by the STRI and possibly other producers may be having similar work conducted by other organisations which should help in the availability of independent data.

The article was compiled from numerous sources including recent editions of the USGA's Green Section Record, personal and culminated experience from within STRI and from the trial work conducted both at STRI and in Australia. Interestingly, it was only having completed the seminar on this subject in Adelaide this year at the AGCSA Conference that I was informed of their current trials on this subject which they have carried out totally independently. Although some greenkeepers at the conference intimated to me that they have had some success with microbial products, the results of the Australian trials revealed no significant effects and in essence therefore were not dissimilar to those of STRI. I have found a similar response among British greenkeepers where some appear to see some benefits while others see none.

Clearly from an ecological and environmental point of view, any biological product that helps reduce the amount of pesticides and other chemicals including nitrogenous and phosphatic fertilisers must be welcomed. However without meaningful data substantiated by research how can consultants advise on the pros and cons of the products available.

My own personal view is that the use of microbial products will over time become increasingly important, particularly so given the likely withdrawal of many other chemical products we have become so reliant upon. On existing greens that have become compromised, lacking strong microbial associations, microbial products may find their niche. On healthy surfaces, however, where microbial populations are strong, their value is likely to be reduced. At the end of the talk in Adelaide I asked the question, "What future for microbes?" This section was for some reason omitted at source from the article printed but basically I do see a role, particularly on new sand-based constructions where initial microbe populations are likely to be low. Introducing microbes here may accelerate turf establishment. Ensuring strong microbial populations through the growing and establishment phases may also suppress disease. The presence of a healthy soil fauna is likely to be essential for seed germination, seedling establishment and in encouraging greater rooting depth. While writing this, it did cross my mind that composted material produced in-house would give similar effects "at little cost". This does raise the question therefore, "Are commercial microbial suppliers likely to experience a new level of competition in the near future given the current resurgence of interest in composting organic materials and the European legislation that beckons".

My article was written to stimulate thought and interest, and in the main to re-emphasise the need for ongoing intensive cultural practices. Indeed, there can be no substitute for traditional greenkeeping even if it is now being cosseted by modern mechanical equipment.

I am pleased to see that Symbio are hosting seminars on their products through November and I do sincerely hope that the apparent wealth of data currently held within this and other organisations and repeatedly requested by STRI can be made more available to those of us working within the field.

Bob Taylor, STRI