



Turf: A Growing Concern

By Tim Mudge

Picture courtesy of Norman Maitland

When it comes to choosing turf, you can't ask too many questions. Making the right selection can mean the difference between having your course in play or not. Establishing a good relationship with your turf grower is essential – after all, they want to supply you with the best turf for your course and you want nothing less than the best. Turf growers want to listen. Only by having a full understanding of the golf industry and by learning more about the issues facing greenkeepers, can they ensure that their businesses continue to produce turf that meets the needs of the people who maintain it.

A grower should have a genuine interest in understanding your turf needs and working with you – over time – to meet them. TGA member growers are committed to producing quality cultivated turf and work side by side with industry partners to ensure end-users receive the very best turf possible now, and in the future.

When considering greenkeepers' requirements for turf, climate change and changing maintenance regimes provide possibly the greatest challenge. The choice of cultivars in turf has always been critical but changing times will make it more so.

Growers have for years been aware of the need for grasses that are more tolerant of drought, flood, disease, shade, wear and, where there's a coastal location, salt. The major seed producers invest heavily in their breeding programmes and are working hard to develop cultivars which will address the issues facing greenkeepers in the future. Growers, as an end-user themselves, take a keen interest in these developments and work with seed companies in taking their developments through to the finished product. Ask your grower for a breakdown of the grass varieties in their turf, and refer to the 2007 BSPB/STRI seed listings to assess their suitability for your course.

It's important to find out how a grower maintains their turf before it's harvested. Those who produce top quality turf for golf courses invest heavily in the latest machinery and irrigation systems to ensure the turf grown on their farms is maintained in the way it would be on a golf course. Greens turf, for example, should be top-dressed regularly to prevent the accumulation of thatch and treated with fungicide to prevent disease. One of the distinct benefits of using turf rather than seed is the instant mature effect, and the maintenance of an appropriate mowing height at the turf farm is crucial. Tees turf should be maintained at

around 12-15mm, bent/fescue greens turf at around 6-8mm, and 3mm for creeping bent turf. In this way, turf should be playable within a short time of laying.

The key to successful turfing is rootzone compatibility. Problems of surface water retention will occur if the soil at the turf farm is substantially different from the golf course rootzone. It's important that you discuss with your grower the most appropriate growing medium for your course. Increasingly, greenkeepers are buying a custom grown turf using a specified rootzone.

These days, turf is delivered within hours of being harvested to arrive with you fresh. You should receive strong, uniform rolls, virtually free of *Poa annua* and free from disease, with a dense sward. During particularly hot periods of the summer, heat damage within the turf roll can be a problem. This can be avoided by harvesting turf in the early hours of the morning, and by the use of temperature-controlled lorries for longer journeys.

Having been given the opportunity to write for Greenkeeper International with a turf grower's view, it would be remiss of me not to mention some of the issues associated with turfgrass production at present. Changes in Health and Safety legislation have encouraged the change

from manual to automatic turf stacking. Growers have had to invest six figure sums on bigger and more technically advanced machines imported from the States in order to improve efficiencies and to meet the new regulations. Pesticide legislation – and a general feeling that as an industry we ought to think more about our impact on the environment - has meant that turf growers have to consider how they'll treat common problems without the use of chemicals. Last summer's drought provided new challenges for greenkeepers and growers alike in the South East of England. As an association, we've been proactive in promoting the beneficial role of natural turf in replenishing aquifers, and in calling for a 28-day exemption from drought orders for newly established turf.

Turf growing continues to evolve and innovate in anticipation of such challenges. Our members are constantly looking at ways to help greenkeepers meet new demands from increased traffic, changing legislation and environmental pressures. The need for low mowing and fertiliser inputs, concerns about clippings disposal and the possible withdrawal of effective Poa control chemicals have prompted investigations into the use of different grass species, with growers exploring the possible benefits of tall fescues, hard and sheeps fescues, and velvet bents to the end-user.

Meeting these demands will depend on a close and continuing dialogue between growers and greenkeepers. The TGA exists to support growers, and our ongoing research and development programme reflects our commitment to helping them meet the future needs of the sportsturf industry.

Tim Mudge is a member of the Turfgrass Growers Association.

The TGA invites readers to see at first hand the latest techniques and innovations for establishing, growing, harvesting, handling, transporting, laying and maintaining cultivated turf by visiting its turf show on Wednesday, June 27. The one-day event will be hosted by County Turf at its turf farm at Cleatham Hall Farm, nr Kirton Lindsey, North Lincolnshire. Please visit www.turfshow2007.co.uk for more details.



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