



Greenkeeping in the Spring



Who would be a Greenkeeper in the spring! Well we all are and have to contend the elements. As I sit here in early April in the sun, with the temperature in the low 70's I'm sure we will break yet another record, either it will be too dry or cold and, if not that, then too wet for our course to be at its best. They're all just weather, you know, and I'm sure our courses will survive what the weather has to throw at them, Surely greenkeeping is all about maximising your course's potential in any season or space in time. So why do we suffer an onslaught of criticism, especially at this time of the year when we should in fact be buoyed with winter going and spring springing? It is, in my opinion, impatience on the part of our friends, the golfers. They have just gone through the winter months of low daylight hours and mixed with, yes, some weather not best suited to the playing of golf. They can be a frustrated lot and, yes, it has to be said, hard to please.

Then The Masters was on the telly and we started to be the focus of their frustrations. Why is our course not like that? I was looking through web pages and reading of tales of woe about spring greens the other day. I had an email from one of my officials just after the Easter break – The course was good and the members were happy... "But the greens could do with some water. Of course, Billy, you should decide when to water subject to the nightly frost we have been having."

We can all, I'm sure, quote some special comments by our customer, the golfer, that would bring weight to the argument that the spring is a rocky, hellish bridge we would all like to cross as soon as possible, and get on with our business in the main playing part of the golfing season.

So what are we to do to make it an easier transition from the depths of winter to something better? Well I take strength from those cleverer than I in the art of greenkeeping. The first tip for success that springs to mind is good communications. They will always stand you in good stead and I'm sure help you through what could best be described as the crustaceous period we all suffer from in the spring, before active growth starts on our courses. A great place to start is, of course, with your course officials. Explain to them what, in fact, you have done to minimise the effects of a slow, cold start up to the growing season. Ask them for their support to ward off those ill-informed comments from your members or paying customers, but, most importantly, get their full support for any on course renovations that you have planned for the spring because once on board you are halfway there, with them as a fantastic communication link between yourself and your members.

Next on the communication list would be a form of newsletter to the members. Now I'm sure you're familiar with the old doctrine of if you want to keep a secret at your golf club then publish it on a notice board, because no bugger ever reads those. So you could explore the realms of online communications they have been, for the better part, a much more effective means of getting information across and have been, I would think, the best way forward in this modern age. Something we have used at Tyrrells Wood is a phone line message system that members can call on everyday and get an update on course conditions, weather reports and on course works for the day. It has been well received and been a valued communication channel both for my members, my staff and I to keeping everyone informed.

Our course information line has been so successful I'm often told that even if they are not in fact coming to the course to play, they still give it a call most mornings – with some lady members it's the first thing they do, even before getting out of bed.

I think the biggest problem I see when others are in conflict over spring golf, is one of poor communications at the club, it's not the course condition per say, as in most cases the courses are in fairly good nick, really it's just not what they think we can aspire to at this time of the year. So be brave, explain your plans and most of all share your passion with members and I'm sure the transition from spring to summer will pass in a much more pleasant fashion.

Another area that will help is, of course, a tidy golf course. So I work hard to make everything as tidy as possible and it's a fact that it has made my transition a better one, I read an article last week written by a clever man. He said be pro active, trim those bunkers to a high standard and tidy everything up before The Masters starts, then they don't have a leg to stand on - good advice I thought.

Next on the list is ill-timed operations on the course that are seen in the eyes of the golfer to be offensive and do in fact only compound our problems in the spring, so working with any prevailing weather conditions and with modern equipment and systems these days, we can still do any required works in keeping with the golfing calendar even in the spring. All that has to be agreed is when these works will, in fact, take place, keeping everyone's interests in mind for them to be more palatable, therefore achievable, with the net result of it being a win win situation. A master in my opinion is Chris Kennedy, at Wentworth, which has not only a major tournament in the spring but also in the autumn, and he and his team seem almost without exception to beat the weather and season's variables, maximising their potential and providing a first class golfing experience every time.

A timely lesson I think in the art of good greenkeeping and if you think it's good luck, well I'm minded to remember that old comment when a famous golfer was told he was lucky having won a tournament. "Yes" he said, the more I "practice" the luckier I seem to get. I'm sure we all wish Chris and his team lots of luck in the run up to the BMW and I can assure you all, they will be planning on securing lots of luck for themselves.

So, if we can master the art of communication I'm sure we will all have time to celebrate, rather than dread, this special time of year that makes up only part of the wonderful golfing experience we have to offer in the world of golf, here in the British Isles and around the world. You all do a great job. Have a great spring and summer, should be a piece of cake shouldn't it.

Billy McMillan
Chairman

Feature listing from May 2005

May 2005; Hellidon Lakes; Power Mowers; Pest Control; Cutting Heights Survey; Nozzles

June 2005; Minchinhampton GC; Aeration; Rigby Taylor Profile; Chemical Useage; Top Dressing; Jim Arthur Tribute

July 2005; Loch Lomond GC; St. Andrews; Mini Excavators; Disease; Finance; Scholarship

August 2005; Ramsey GC; Open Review; Quad Bikes; Top Dressing; BIGGA Golf Day; Anthracnose; National Championship Preview

September 2005; John O'Gaunt GC; Drainage Special; Security; Student of the Year; Massey Ferguson Profile

October 2005; Laleham GC; Dollar Spot; Utility Vehicles; Bio Oil; Pneumatic Fracturing; Best Practice

November 2005; Chipping Norton GC; National Championship; Course Construction; Fertilisers; Servicing

December 2005; Harrogate Week Preview; BIGGA Delegation; Environmental Competition; Fescue Debate; Irrigation

January 2006; Bearwood Lakes GC; Course Furniture; Nicklaus Design; Seed; Alternative Fuel; Disease Survey

February 2006; Cold Ashby GC; Netting; Chemical Fertilisers; Turf Construction

March 2006; Seed; Ride-on Mowers; Pesticides; Irrigation; Bio Stimulants

April 2006; R&A Conference Report; Scornie GC Profile; GCSAA Delegation Report; Wastewater

May 2006; Stock Brook GC Profile; Spraying; Aeration; Line Marking; Growth Retardants

June 2006; Disturbance Theory; Hand Tools; Surveying; Thatch/Scarification; Drought

July 2006; Hoylake Profile; Difficult Areas; Japanese Course Management; Top Dressing; Askernish Project

August 2006; Open Championship Review; Drainage; Burton GC Profile; Sustainability; Japan; ATVs; Trailers

September 2006; Building an Irrigation Lake; Toro Student of the Year Preview; Artificial Surfaces; Algae

October 2006; Trevoze GC Profile; Aeration; Utility Vehicles; Open Aftermath; Grinding Equipment

November 2006; National Championship; BIGGA Photographic Exhibition; Drainage Explained; Greens Brushing

December 2006; BIGGA Environment Competition Results; Harrogate Week Preview; Work Wear; Paths; Tyres

January 2007; Turfgrass training; Harrogate Week Preview; Grass selection; Think Ergonomically; Petrol complying; Marvellous Mowers; BIGGA in the USA

February 2007; Happy Harrogate; A Hand on the Controls; Pedestrian Mowers; Sustainable Solutions; Sunningdale Ladies GC Profile; No Introduction Necessary; Keeping it Green.

March 2007; Brighthouse Bay GC Profile; Landscaping Supplement; Organic Fertilisers; Greens Triples; Waste & Recycling; Bunker Building; Turf; A Growing Concern; Every Drop Counts.

April 2007; Best Peak Practice; Honey I shrunk the grass; Fairway mowers; Trip of a lifetime; Preventing disease; Its a lifestyle choice; Strike a pose; Algae.