



On the Soapbox

Stuart Yarwood MG, Course Manager at Lymm Golf Club in Cheshire, concludes the article he started last week

Last month Stuart Yarwood MG mounted the Soapbox to talk about soil biology. He was only just getting into his stride when we had to drag him off. This month he's back to finish what he started...

A good golf green environment should be good enough to support our beneficial soil ecology and it needs to be nourished.

In order for the biology to work it needs something to do in order to break down organic matter.

This comes in many forms, and we, as greenkeepers, are striving to reduce it all the time, mainly in the form of thatch reduction, or surface organic matter.

Yes, we hollow core every year, scarify, pencil tine and anything else we can find from the shed, to reduce thatch and we do this every year.

And every year it upsets the surfaces, with golfers following on behind.

But are we working hard just to stand still?

Do we genuinely see an improvement in reduction of thatch?

Maybe with an eye for the biology within the soil and its requirements we can get it to work for us. If only we weren't killing it off all the time.

There is a need for soil organic matter inputs to feed and grow the biology. Seaweeds, organic fertilisers such as hoof and horn, dried blood, soils or fen peats that can replace or buffer our inorganic fertiliser feeds by being broken down through humification and those nutrients made available to the grass plants.

There is a growing trend, dangerous in my opinion, of trying to dilute surface organic matter with pure sands.

These are cheap to buy, easy and convenient to apply, as they don't upset the playing surface.

They would appear to firm surfaces in the short term, but with ineffective surface organic matter reduction, these layers will be pushed down causing future problems, such as layering and poor drainage.

One can't argue with the cries of Auld Tom Morris and "Mair sand Honeyman" calling for the local dune sand to be

applied to smooth the local surfaces and dilute surface organic matter, but these, however, contained some form of organic amendments, at varying times, such as seaweed or chimney soot, rich in carbon, the building blocks of life, and great food for the fescue loving fungi,

Many topdressing materials supplied today contain some form of organic amendment, which can serve to grow the soil biology.

One has to question the benefit of these products after they have been sterilised through heat treatment processes to kill off any weeds seeds or pathogens, and importantly any good biology in the dressings that you would want to keep.

Are we simply buying dirty, inorganic, hydrophobic sand, just because its easy and convenient to rub in?

If we are specifying some form of organic amendment within our dressings we need to move away from the ratios eg, 70/30, 80/20's etc and look at actually what

are all things that can upset our golfing customers but we must resist the convenience route, hoping and trying to keep people happy.

It is difficult in these compromised economic times but if we start to think about how we manage our turf and the consequences it has upon our soils, we may start to see the benefit for our soils, our surfaces, and our balance sheets.

Nutrition, aeration, water management, organic matter and top dressings play an effective role in soil biology, but like any eco system it has to be grown, nourished and nurtured.

We are dealing with nature, a cruel mistress at times, one to work with and not against, and it is folly to think we can just go in and erect something like good soil biology overnight!

It takes teamwork, even down to the smallest microscopic members of your team.

Convenience - but who are we kidding? (Part two)

percentage of organic is within.

I think we would all be shocked how little, once we found out! It would make more sense to ensure our quality control measures and specifications, as Greenkeepers, Agronomists and Suppliers are strict enough to support the agronomic direction of the club.

To provide for the future, to remain healthy and to sustain ourselves, we have to eat well and play well. Happy Life!

We would test the resolve of our doctors, although they do have a lot of patience, if we were to tell them at our annual Well Man Clinic that we are getting by on shop-bought ready meals, vitamin tablets and Red Bull!

They would soon be writing us a prescription for bracing walks along the pier, fresh water, and nutritionally-balanced, low fat, home cooked foods with plenty of fresh veggies.

Our playing surfaces are no different, and the best medicine doesn't always taste the sweetest.

Aeration, drainage, organic topdressings, clearing shade to improve sunlight, limiting chemical and nutritional inputs



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