



Proactive approach gets greener results

We speak to a course manager reaping the rewards of taking a more proactive approach to winter disease control

The outstanding playing conditions at Woodhall Spa Golf Club in Lincolnshire, which is the home of England Golf, attract golfers all year round.

But the sandy soils and dry conditions ensure the Hotchkin course remains playable when others are closed.

Maintaining turf cover and quality on the greens over the winter is imperative for Course Manager, Sam Rhodes, to satisfy the early season demand.

Over recent years he has adopted a proactive approach with his fungicide programme, seeking to prevent infection breaking out before damage occurs on the playing surface.

“In the past we had simply reacted to disease attacks; we were fighting to control outbreaks and limit the extent of damage to greens over the winter.

“Then we had to work extra hard in the spring to get them back in good condition as quickly as possible.

“It was the same cycle every year.



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“We wanted to look at preventing disease damage.

“However, we were adamant that we didn’t want to go down a routine prophylactic treatment of spraying a fungicide every five or six weeks.

“We are keen to minimise the use of any inputs, from an ecological and economic standpoint.

“The solution has been to introduce a proactive approach that integrates new developments in fungicide technology and turf disease risk assessment, alongside traditional greenkeeping techniques and experience - with

the aim to maintain clean surfaces right through the winter.

“We recognised that with the potential of the new fungicides, we needed to be smarter in the way that we used them to get the best results.”

Sam believes they now understand better what they are aiming to achieve with each application, and selecting the most appropriate option that best matches the situation.

That means he will pick a systemic when turf is actively growing; a cool weather systemic as it starts to slow in the autumn, and then only switch to a contact when growth has effectively stopped.

He uses soil temperature information as a guide to turf growth and selecting the appropriate fungicide.

“With the changing weather patterns you really can’t apply fungicides by the calendar anymore, which makes weather-based prediction even more important.”

As part of this, Sam now also uses the local five-day disease fore-

casts on the GreenCast website as a key tool to pre-empt and prevent damaging disease attacks.

He stresses that it certainly doesn’t replace his local knowledge and experience of the course, but is a valuable adjunct in supporting his decision making.

“This approach has really made us think about every application, and how we can integrate them with better cultural controls to help improve results.”

Assessing any impending disease risk, Sam will look at what fungicide was last applied and when; how much growth there has been; if the turf is under any particular stress and any other factors that might make the greens more or less susceptible to specific disease infection.

“If we feel there is still sufficient protection in the plant or if it is all looking particularly healthy, for example, the risk assessment helps give us the confidence to leave it a few more days, or possibly apply an iron treatment.

“But where we can see the risk is high, we can be assured that we



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Temperature controlled fungicide selection

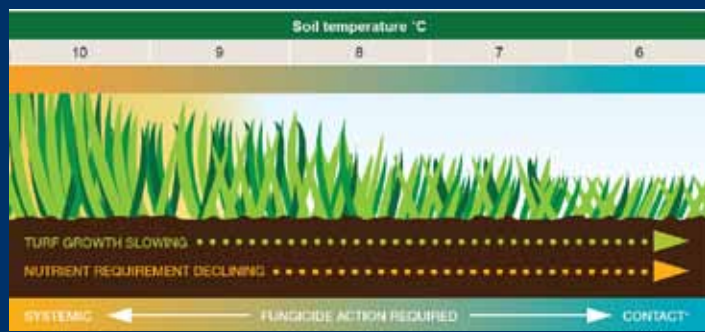
Soil temperatures that dictate turf growth rates give an essential guide to appropriate fungicide selection to avoid damaging disease attacks through autumn and winter conditions, and protect playing surface quality, advises Syngenta Technical Manager, Dr Simon Watson.

Over recent seasons, late autumn and early winter has seen prolonged warm temperatures, or more specifically higher soil temperatures, with continued growth.

When turf is actively growing a systemic fungicide is essential; contact or local penetrant fungicides applied at this time will quickly grow up the leaf and be cut off – leaving new growth at the base of the leaf exposed to infection within hours of application.

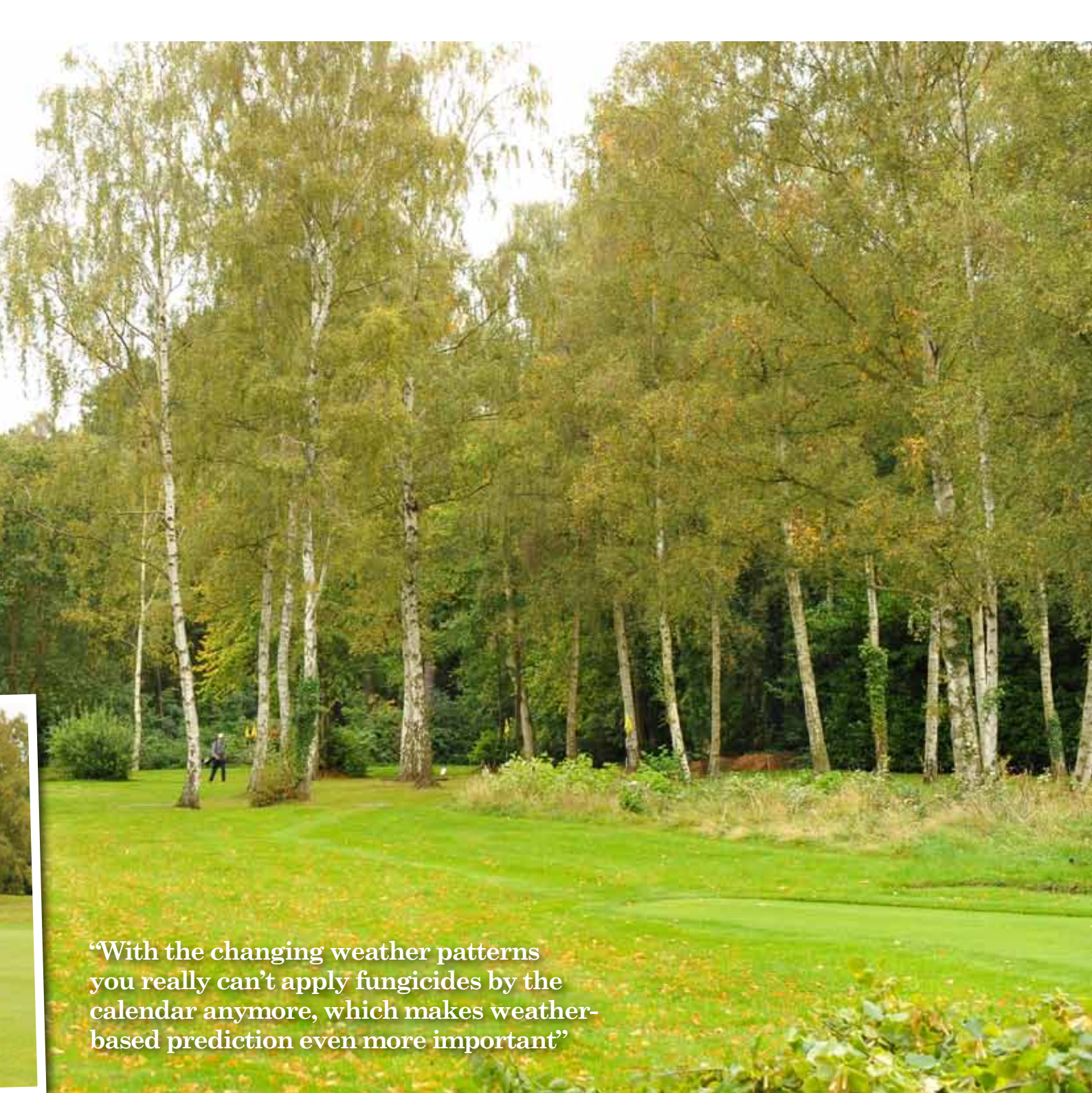
As temperatures cool, but whilst turf is still actively growing, a cool weather systemic will provide fast moving protection, to prevent loss of turf quality.

As growing conditions slow further, the contact+ Medallion TL will be more appropriate to reduce the pathogen presence in the thatch and protect the leaf through the cold weather, when the grass plant is dormant.



Checklist for autumn and winter fungicide selection:

- Track soil temperatures and clipping yield to check turf growth
- Employ ITM practices to reduce risk of disease build-up
- Use a cool weather systemic fungicide whilst turf is still growing
- Switch to contact+ protection with slow or zero turf growth
- Manage nutrition to keep turf healthy, but avoid soft growth
- Use GreenCast local disease forecasts to pro-actively prevent infection



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are taking the right action with a fungicide application.”

Sam recalled that last winter GreenCast predicted a high risk of Microdochium Patch (Fusarium) and the looming prospect of cold weather.

He fortuitously took the decision to apply Medallion TL prior to the snow, and when it finally cleared after several weeks the greens surfaces were completely clean.

“We didn’t know the snow cover was going to be so long, but having seen the high risk of snow it did prompt us to get the protection on early.

“We were also confident the protection would stay in place with

zero growth beneath the snow.

“With the combination of improved cultural controls and more targeted fungicides, even the most susceptible greens have stayed completely clean, which has received favourable comments from players.”

Seeing and experiencing the results means the Woodhall Spa members and club management have been convinced that it is the right approach, which Sam believes will make further activities easier to implement.

“We are extremely proud of the ecological credentials of the course, but are also aware that the quality of the greens and the course is essen-

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tial to attract members and visitors.

“With the proactive and integrated approach to managing the playing surfaces we are only using treatments where they are required, and we are able to justify every application we make.

“Even with the extremely challenging weather conditions we are increasingly experiencing, we have found that we are able to maintain better turf quality.

“And by using the fungicide treatments more effectively, we have actually made fewer applications over the course of the season.

We certainly feel much more in control and ready for what might happen.”