

(Continued from last month)

## TOP DRESSING — A MAINTENANCE MUST

By Dr. Eliot C. Roberts

A layer of sand on top of soil is not detrimental as long as the sand stays on top. Such a condition is difficult to maintain. Where putting greens have been properly constructed, a safe rule to follow is topdress with a material which contains about the same sand-soil-organic matter ratio as the topsoil in the green.

**Fourth** — The topdressing should contain enough soil to provide good growth conditions. These include good soil structure, capacity for providing plant food to grass roots, proper soil-air-water relationships and good buffering capacity. A soil that is too heavy or too sandy is undesirable because of the factors cited above. The soil should be fertile and may be enriched by adding fertilizer if necessary.

### Recommended Topdressing Procedures

For most conditions where greens are well constructed with a good sand-soil-mixture and where previous topdressing has not contained excessive sand, soil or organic matter, a topdressing mixture of 50% soil (good black topsoil) and 50% sand (as coarse and sharp as possible) by volume should give good results. Where organic matter content of the topsoil is low as evidenced by a light brown color a good grade of compost as first choice or peat moss as second choice should be mixed with the soil and sand.

(Concluded on last page)

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In this case 33% soil, 33% sand and 33% organic matter, by volume is advised. Vermiculite, calcined clay pellets and other mineral soil conditioners may be effectively substituted for the organic matter. It has been observed that of these various materials the clay pellets have a longer lasting effect within the soil. Apparently there is less physical breakdown of the treated clay pellets and they retain their conditioning effects for a prolonged period of time. Where these materials are used, rates of application should follow manufacturers directions since experiment station research data is unfortunately not available.

Topdressing should be sterilized to kill weed seeds. This should be done sufficiently ahead of use to allow the readjustment of microbiological population which may have been upset by the use of soil sterilants. Calcium cyanamide mixed with topdressing at the rate of 13 pounds per cubic yard has been found effective. Methyl bromide, Vapam and Mylone have also been used frequently with good results. Spread the topdressing out to a 6-8 inch layer in a sterilization bed. Make chemical application according to manufacturers directions. Methyl bromide must be held within the soil by use of a plastic cover. Vapam and Mylone are kept within the soil as a result of puddling the surface to form an impervious crust. Incubation time will depend on the material used and varies from a minimum of 2 to 3 weeks with calcium cyanamid to 36 to 72 hours for methyl bromide. Preparation and sterilization of topdressing may be efficiently handled on a rainy day or off season job where facilities permit.

Topdressing may be mixed with an application of fertilizer so that one treatment will accomplish two jobs at once. It is important to have fertilizer and topdressing mixed uniformly for best results. The type of fertilizer used is not important as long as its analysis conforms with the needs of the turf and the decomposition requirements of the thatch.

The amount of topdressing required will depend to a large extent on the condition of the turf. Also the frequency of application will be regulated by the specific objective of topdressing. Newly stolonized greens should be topdressed frequently with sufficient material to encourage root development on newly formed runners. Topdressing for thatch control or removal will require small applications at frequent intervals in spring and fall following vertical mowing and aeration. Spot treatments may be made during any period of rapid growth to correct surface irregularities. Depressions of 1/2 to 1 inch or more deep are often more effectively corrected by lifting the sod, filling in with soil and then replacing the sod at the improved grade.

Topdressing should be matted in with a metal mat or with a section of heavy gauge wire fencing. Where necessary these may be weighted with boards to insure a leveling of the added material. Matting should be done at several angles to prevent ridging of the material and the building up of high spots. Since the method of topdressing application varies from mechanical spreading to shoveling, uniform distribution of material by thorough matting is important. The matting in of plugs following aeration may be helpful as a top dressing measure. Sweep off the bits of thatch after the soil has been worked into the green. If aeration is heavy this can be an effective method of improving turfgrass quality. It is not as effective where poor soil conditions are responsible for a thin weak turf.

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