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REMEMBER THE BASICS - MOWING

Many times good mowing practices are taken for granted. Mowing is not the simple operation of only removing excess growth. It is a process which greatly affects the health and vigor of turf and therefore should be worthy of careful study. Without good mowing the finest of other maintenance practices would never be completely effective.

When a turf area is mowed, the most obvious result is that the leaf surface of the grass plant is reduced. However, there are many other less obvious consequences resulting from mowing. Some of these are: 1) a temporary stopping of root growth, 2) carbohydrate production and storage is reduced, 3) the ratio of top growth to roots changes, 4) shading of lower leaves is reduced, 5) a port of entry for diseases is opened, 6) water loss is temporarily increased and 7) water uptake is decreased.

The turfgrass manager has several management choices which directly affects the less obvious consequences resulting from mowing. The principal choices are: height of cut, frequency of mowing, when to mow, the patterns of mowing and type of equipment to be used. The majority of these choices were discussed in ProTurf Issue 3. In this article we will discuss patterns of mowing and types of equipment used.

Mowing Pattern

Mowing continually in the same direction encourages the grass leaves to grow in the same direction. Such a pattern is often referred to as grain. Changing direction with each mowing decreases grain and creates an attractive pattern.

Because of design it is often easier to change mowing directions on some turf areas than on others. For instance, it is easier to alter mowing directions on greens and tees than on long areas such as fairways. Mowing pattern is even more rigid on some institutional areas. The first cut is generally made on the outside of the area and the same pattern is repeated over and over until the tires form a track or compacted strips. On subsequent mowing this means that the wheel will follow in the same path time after time.

Many times it is profitable to stop and take enough time to study mowing practices and patterns. For example, we mentioned that golf course fairways are generally mowed lengthwise. Undoubtedly, this does save some valuable time. However, when fairways are mowed continuously in this manner, turns are usually made in front of the tee or approach to the green. As a consequence, the valuable playing area in front of the green suffers, looks poorly and tends to loosen grass. Of course, such areas are also subject to more compaction which directly affects the area being maintained.

One solution which will help prevent this problem is to initially consider building the green or tee so mower turns can be made by circling behind the green or tee with alternating passes. When this is done there is less wear and tear on the approach areas as well as less compaction problems. A second solution is to make gradual turns and disengage the reels if possible so turns can be made with the reels idle. When making turns, spinning reels may cause scraping and damage. Of course the sharper the turn and the faster the reel spins, the more severe the damage.

There is also the possibility of mowing the fairway crossways rather than lengthwise. This practice is not as time consuming as one might think. Cross mowing can often be continued without interfering with play or interrupting the tractor driver, especially if two parallel fairways can be mowed at the same time. A driver mowing a fairway lengthwise may be stopped 20-30% of the time waiting on play. It may also be feasible to mow such areas from corner to opposite corner. In other words, on long slanting paths. This will permit alternate mowing in two directions.

We originally referred to "grain" which may result by continuous mowing in one direction. Vigorous growing grasses such as creeping bents and bermudas produce above ground parts called stolons. They grow horizontally along the ground and many of them are not cut off by normal mowing operations. When they accumulate a "grainy" condition develops. In time a mat or thatch problem exists.

A grainy condition can generally be kept to a minimum by alternating mowing patterns and occasionally using a brush attachment on greens mowers. Brushing will raise the stolons so they are cut off in mowing. Brushing should be performed frequently during spring and fall when the growth rate is rapid. Infrequent brushing is suggested during the hot summer months. Verticutting in combination with brushing are the keys in preventing graininess and thatch build up.

Kinds of Mowers

Mowers used to maintain recreational turfgrass areas are either of the reel or rotary type although flail mowers may also be used for certain areas. Each mower has its advantages and disadvantages and only you can decide which mower type is best for your specific needs. Most manufacturers do a fine job by providing specific information which will be helpful in making the proper selection.

Reel mowers are generally used on areas where a low and quality cut is desired. Good examples are golf course greens, tees and fairways. A reel mower should not be used to mow tall grass.

Rotary mowers perform best on grasses being maintained at higher mowing heights. They are especially adapted to coarse-textured grasses. One of the biggest advantages of a rotary is economy. The blade is usually mounted directly on the engine shaft. Belts, clutches and gears are not required for operation as in the case of most reel mowers. With frequent filing the blade is also simple to sharpen. However, rotary mowers are more dangerous to use than reel mowers. The high velocity of the rotating blade can

pick up foreign objects and hurl them with lethal force.

Regardless of the mower selected, good maintenance is of utmost importance. If there is a single most important function in mowing, it is keeping the blade sharp. The frequency of sharpening depends on conditions of use. The more foreign objects passing through a mower, the more often it will need sharpening. A reel mower should be sharpened by back lapping where the reel and bedknife is sharpened and mated. Lapping can also be used between sharpenings to increase the keenness of cut. However, lapping will not correct dullness when the blade is rounded and worn.

Mowers should be cleaned after every mowing. Manufacturers recommendations should be closely followed. In addition to increasing the life of the mower, cleanliness also develops pride. When a crew member uses a clean, sharp and well-maintained mower, he becomes more than a mower jockey. A man with pride in his mower will do a better job and also increase the life of the machine because he will give it better care. Of course, this has to be taught from the beginning of his first workday.

Any mower is potentially dangerous and careless operation should never be tolerated. The number of mowing injuries could be greatly curtailed by following an absolute set of safety rules.

Proturf Issue Four
Jud Engstrom
Marysville, Ohio

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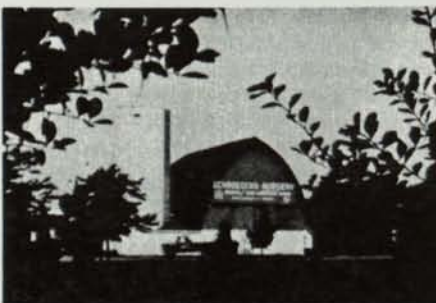
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The deepest sympathy of the Midwest Association of Golf Course Superintendents is extended to the Bradley Nass family. Bradley, brother of Mike Nass who is supt. at Bryn Mawr C.C. was killed on August 7 at 2:30 a.m. in a train accident near Aurora, Ill.

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