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FRONT COVER

Hole no. 11 at Glen Flora Country Club.
(Photo by Jim Trzinski)

- 3 **ON COURSE WITH THE PRESIDENT**
Time Flies When You're "On Board"
Luke Strojny

- 5 **DIRECTOR'S COLUMN**
Hats Off to 2002 Meeting Hosts, Sponsors
Mike Mumper

- 7 **ASK THE "EXPERT"**
The Dirt on Soil Testing
Curt Franklin

- 13 **SUPER -N- SITE**
Paul Bastron -N- Glen Flora Country Club
Bob McCallum

- 17 **FEATURE ARTICLE**
Barley Straw Products: An All-Natural Solution to Pond Problems
Carol Holmes

- 22 **THE VOICE OF EXPERIENCE**
Bob Williams

- 22 **FROM THE EDITOR**
Cathy Miles Ralston

- 23 **UPDATE**
What's Growing At Midwest Golf House: Present and Future
Carl Hopphan

- 26 **THE BULL SHEET**
John Gurke

- 30 **SNEAK PEEK**
50th Annual Midwest Turf Clinic At Medinah C.C.

- 31 **BOARD HIGHLIGHTS**

- 33 **IN COMMITTEE**
Environmental Awareness and Community Outreach: A Win-Win Combination
Tim Anderson

- 35 **MIDWEST PERSONALITIES**

The Midwest Association of Golf Course Superintendents (MAGCS), founded December 24, 1926, is a professional organization whose goals include preservation and dissemination of scientific and practical knowledge pertaining to golf turf maintenance.

We endeavor to increase efficiency and economic performance while improving and enhancing the individual and collective prestige of the members.

The MAGCS member is also an environmental steward. We strive to uphold and enhance our surroundings by promoting flora and fauna in every facet in a manner that is beneficial to the general public now and in the future.

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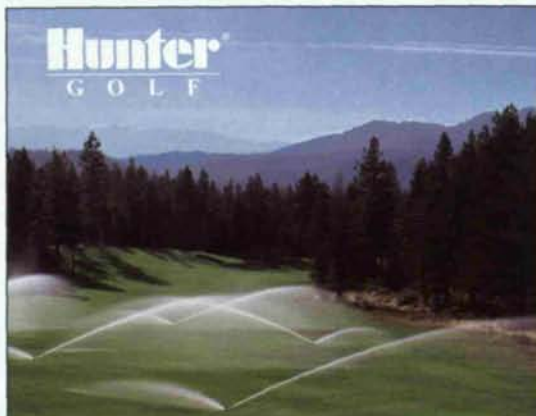
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ON COURSE WITH THE PRESIDENT

Luke Strojny, CGCS Poplar Creek C.C.

Time Flies When You're "On Board"

"Years grow shorter, not longer, the more you have been on your own." If you reflect on this statement, you realize how true it is. When you are young, time seems to stand still, but as you grow older, time kicks into high gear and the years fly by.

Before I was a member of the Board, I found it very easy to criticize the meeting structure, the education, the prizes or anything else I thought wasn't right. Then I got elected and realized the amount of work and dedication it takes to serve the membership.

My time on the Midwest Association's Board of Directors has flown by, although there have been times that I thought it would never end. When I was elected to the Board, I didn't really know what to expect. At the time, I was certainly not planning on becoming president (sure, now he tells us!). What I WAS anticipating was giving back to an Association that had given so much to me, then maybe getting out in a few years. Well . . . the bug got me and here I am now, president at least for one more month.

So much has changed with the MAGCS in the last eight years. How many remember the days when you just showed up at a meeting without pre-registration? Either the Golf or Arrangements Committee chairman would walk out of the club with several thousand dollars in cash and checks. Some must remember how difficult it was for members to accept the "new policy" of prepayment. In those days, a meeting with 75 people was big for us.

Another step the Board took during my tenure was the reconstruction of our newsletter. This was a decision filled with controversy. Then-president Joel Purpur led the Board and prevailed despite those who said, "It will never work." The making of *On Course* took a lot of dedication and hard work plus some great input from the membership to make it one of the finest publications in the industry today.

Before I was a member of the Board, I found it very easy to criticize the meeting structure, the education, the prizes or anything else I thought wasn't right. Then I got elected and realized the amount of work and dedication it takes to serve the membership. Yes, the Board of Directors does not always get it right, but we try to do our best. So if you are one who can help out and keep our Association moving forward, I encourage you to step forward. Serve on a committee, write an article, speak at the clinic or run for the Board. Then you will see for yourself how time flies.

As I approach completion of my term, it is my pleasure to welcome Dave Armentrout to the Board as the commercial representative. Dave is filling the position vacated by Paul Yerkes. Dave comes to us with previous expertise as a commercial rep for another chapter. I would like to thank Dave for accepting

(continued on page 34)

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Hats Off to 2002 Meeting Hosts, Sponsors

As another year comes to a close, with most of us finishing up aerification or buttoning up our fall course-improvement projects, it is time to reflect on this past year's golf meetings.

No doubt about it, our meetings took us to some great venues this year, all in the same state no less. If you missed any of the meetings, you truly missed some special golf courses: Tamarack, Whisper Creek, Phillips Park, Merit Club, Green Acres, Pine Meadow and Glen Flora. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our gracious hosts: Luke Cella, Jim Wyffels, Lynn Wesson, Oscar Miles, David Radaj, Tom Savage and Paul Bastron.

*Suffice to say,
we are always in
need of sites to hold
future meetings.
I would hope you
will give some
thought to approach-
ing your club about
hosting an MAGCS
meeting in the
near future.*

It has become very difficult to find venues that can accommodate the MAGCS. In the past, many clubs would volunteer their courses for our monthly golf meetings. Participating in meetings typically cost our members very little. Unfortunately, times have changed and most clubs are not in the position financially to offer the MAGCS a free ride or, for that matter, the requisite time, which could be utilized (more profitably perhaps) by another organization.

That's where our sponsors come in. We are fortunate to have many sponsors to help supplement the cost of our meetings, thereby making attendance affordable. We should all be grateful for the generosity of our 2002 meeting sponsors:

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Suffice to say, we are always in need of sites to hold future meetings. I would hope you will give some thought to approaching your club about hosting an MAGCS meeting in the near future. We will have sign-up sheets for meeting spots at our November meeting at Medinah. But why wait until then—sign up now by calling either Kevin DeRoo or me to reserve your date.





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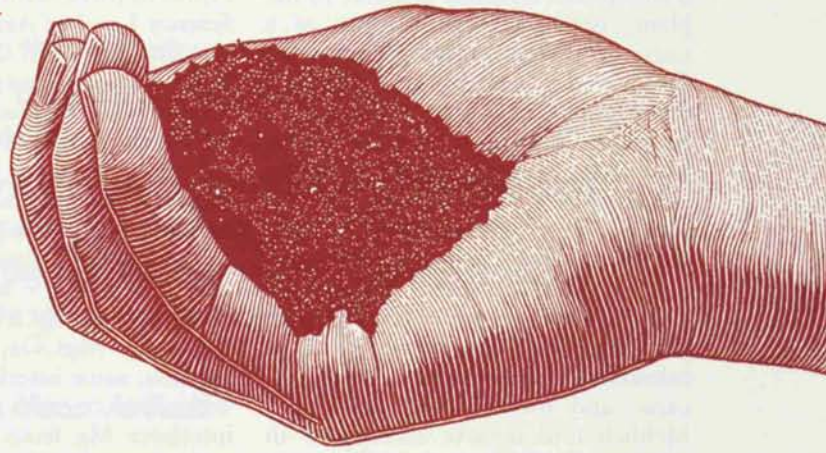
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The Dirt on Soil Testing



Do you take soil tests?

I do not mean exams in soils class 101, but soil analyses from your golf course greens, tees and/or fairways. When did you last administer a soil test? How often do you take soil tests? At what locations? What procedure do you use? Why? Answering these questions and comprehending the soil-test report are half the battle. The other half consists of the superintendent implementing the correct procedures per the soil-test recommendations: types of products, timing on products, and how much product to use per application. Soil-testing labs usually standardize the recommendations for balancing the nutrient levels, but superintendents need to customize these reports to fit into their specific programs.

When obtaining a soil analysis, do not fertilize or supplement with micronutrients at least two weeks before and after the analysis. Fertilizing can skew the lab results and give you false recommendations on your soil-test report.

Soil testing is a vital tool in the superintendent's extra-extra-large tool belt. Just as stock analysts use financial reports to predict the future of stocks, a superintendent can predict and prepare for the future by using soil analysis, which identifies nutrient deficiencies, anticipates nutrient needs, evaluates the excess or imbalance of essential nutrients, heavy metals and/or salts, and assesses the pH level, organic matter content and CEC. In that sense, soil testing offers all aspects of evaluating the soil's chemical properties and is not just limited to the identification of essential nutrient deficiencies.

Several guidelines govern the taking of soil samples. Sampling can be done any time of year: spring, summer, fall and winter. The depth of the soil sample should consist of four to five inches of soil and soil mat (if thatch > one inch, then sample to six or seven inches) unless the superintendent is only trying to reduce pH. Then he or she should only sample the first inch of soil. Next, try to obtain at least 10 four-inch samples from one test site to compile a complete sample. When obtaining a soil analysis, do not fertilize or supplement with micronutrients at least two weeks before and after the analysis. Fertilizing can skew the lab results and give you false recommendations on your soil-test report. Also, be consistent year after year on the timing of the soil analysis since soil conditions can change from season to season. Routine sampling may take place every two to three years unless the superintendent is attempting to alter some chemical aspect of the soil. If this is the case, then sampling on a yearly basis is needed.

How do the soil-testing laboratories actually test soil samples? They use chemical extractants to remove the portion of soil nutrient that is plant-available and use two approaches (SLAN or BCSR, explained later) to assess

(continued on page 8)

the cation nutrient status. The lab starts off mixing the chemical extractant with the soil sample and then filtering out the liquid solution. This solution is a measure of a particular nutrient that is readily available to the plant, not the total quantity of a nutrient. Different soil-testing labs around the nation use different extractants. The absolute values for a nutrient measured by chemical extractants may change from lab to lab; however, the ranking of the nutrient level (low, medium, high) should correlate regardless of the soil-testing lab used. Sometimes extractants are recommended for certain situations, like Olsen for P in calcareous soils, Mehlich III for volcanic and loess-derived soils, and Mehlich I to remove excessive P in calcareous soils. Superintendents that have calcareous sand, soils with free

calcium carbonates, should be extra careful and consult their testing lab on the extractant being used.

Two philosophies in assessing cation nutrient status are SLAN (Sufficiency Level of Available Nutrients) and BCSR (Basic Cation Saturation Ratio). Usually, soil-test reports document both approaches. The SLAN approach is based on a chemical extractant from the soil forms of the nutrient that are plant-available. This would include the following sites: cations on CEC sites; cations in solution, Ca/Mg associated with relatively soluble Ca-P, $\text{CaMg}(\text{CO}_3)_2$, CaCO_3 , MgCO_3 , CaSO_4 , and MgSO_4 ; some interlayer K associated with illite or mica clays; and some interlayer Mg from montmorillonite and vermiculite clays. Therefore, the SLAN approach includes other plant-available chemical forms of nutrients besides relying solely on cations present on CEC sites. It is the best measure on assessing plant-available nutrients P, K, Ca, Mg, Mn and Fe.

Taking a different perspective, the BCSR approach is based on determining the percent saturation of cations on the exchange sites and not on the total quantity of available cations. It measures a high concentration of one cation and determines the cations replaced from the CEC sites, unlike the SLAN approach that measures more than one site. This becomes a pitfall when a sample comes from a golf green with 6% K saturation and a CEC of 6.4 meq. per 100 g compared to a soil with 6% K saturation and 25.4 meq. per 100 g of CEC. Both saturation percentages of K are the same; however, the golf green CEC is four times less, causing the level of K to be insignificant in the golf green. Using the BCSR approach alone can be misleading and should be supplemented with the SLAN approach for a more thorough test. The most useful BCSR information is determining the severity of Na influence and categorizing salt-affected soils, providing an accurate measure of total CEC, monitoring a fertilization program to see if the cation percentages are changing on the CEC, and comparing ratios quickly to see if they are in question.

What information on the soil-test report is most important and accurate for assessing soil-nutrient status? The soil pH, lime requirement and plant-available nutrients rank at the top. These readings are accurate, repeatable and have the best scientific basis for making fertilizer recommendations. When using this valuable information, take these items into consideration:

- Extractable nutrient levels are reported as lb per acre or ppm: lb per acre = 2 X ppm.
- In acid soils, Ca may be low but Ca deficiency is very rare and the addition of lime would probably eliminate the deficiency of Ca by raising the pH of the soil where the Ca is more plant-available. The only need for Ca fertilization occurs when high levels of Na exist in the soil or Ca:Mg ratios are low. Ca is a larger cation (atomic weight = 40) with a charge of +2 while Na (atomic weight = 23) and Mg (atomic weight = 38) are smaller. The Ca readily replaces Na on the CEC sites because of the large difference between the +1 charge and atomic weight, but the Ca replaces the Mg at a much slower pace because of the similar size and charge.
- Other nutrients (P, K, Mg) can be deficient in the soil and require fertilization to correct them.
- The lime requirement for turfgrass soils should apply to the first four inches of the soil (not eight inches). Eight inches is usually recommended for agronomic crops and four inches should be assumed when comprehending the recommendations of a turfgrass soil report.
- Dolomitic lime is an excellent choice when pH and Mg levels are low.
- pH can be reduced by sulfur over time but this is very difficult to accomplish if calcium carbonates are present in the soil or water.

What information on the soil-test report is most important and accurate for assessing soil-nutrient status? The soil pH, lime requirement and plant-available nutrients rank at the top.

(continued on page 10)

COMPOST

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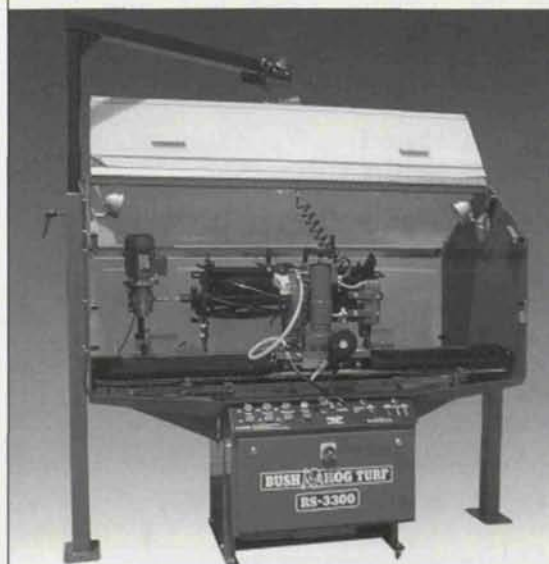
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The second-most-important aspect of assessing soil-nutrient status is the CEC level and extractable Mn and Fe. For example, a soil with a CEC below 4.0 meq. per 100 g will be susceptible to leaching of nutrients and require high maintenance practices to maintain adequate nutrition levels. Mn and Fe provide the best measurable estimate of plant-available nutrients among the micronutrients (Zn, Cu, Mo, B and Ni). If reported levels of Mn or Fe are low, it is normally associated with high-pH (pH>7), calcareous soils. While hot, dry weather inhibits Mn availability to the turf, the exact opposite occurs with Fe in the cold, wet weather. Fe-deficiency symptoms (leaves turn pale yellow to white, spindly) are more pronounced than Mn deficiencies (greenish-gray spots on the young leaves and interveinal yellowing with more extreme deficiencies). After applying Fe and/or Mn from soil-test recommendations, the turf will exhibit a rapid color response if the nutrients are truly deficient.

Next on the list is cation percentages on CEC sites (especially Na), cation ratios based on cation percentages and percent base saturation. Two useful aspects are derived from this category: monitoring the CEC cation status over time to determine if your fertilizer program is affecting the soil, and determining the percent of Na on the CEC site to see if the soil is saline and/or sodic. Remember that this aspect is best utilized over time and not recommended for immediate fertilizer recommendations.

Finally, the fourth category consists of the extractable levels of the remaining micronutrients: Zn, Cu, Mo, B and Ni. These nutrients are usually included in soil tests but are insignificant in the big picture, because they are rarely deficient in the soil. The only precaution would be applying these nutrients at high levels or too often, which in turn may cause toxicities to the turf.

Sometimes comprehending soil tests can be very confusing. Several issues can cause confusion in the soil-test reports.

- The first issue might be that test values are significantly different from last year's results. This may be due to sampling at different soil depths or sending the sample to a different testing lab that is using a different chemical extractant.

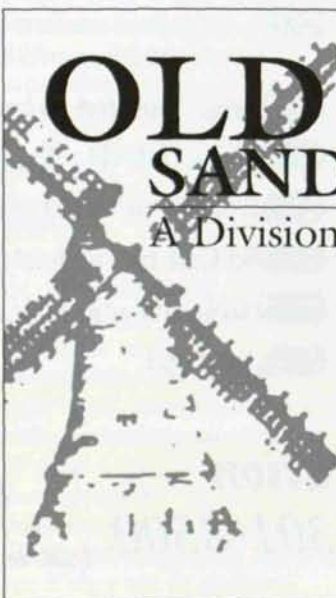
- The chemical extractants used for plant-available micronutrients (Fe, Mn, Zn, Cu, Mo, B and Ni) are not well-correlated to turf; therefore, the soil test only gives a general estimate at best of these micronutrients. Extractants used for plant-available Fe and Mn are better correlated than the other micronutrients, but still are a rough estimate. Excessively high or low levels of micronutrients may alarm superintendents, but micronutrient toxicities are very rare and turf-grasses are very efficient in obtaining micronutrients.

- Labs are in competition and try to provide more information than their competitors. This makes the soil-test report harder to comprehend as it comes replete with information that has no significant value. A good example is the buffer pH. It is used to calibrate the lime requirement, but the buffer pH data is meaningless without the calibration curve that provides the lime requirement. Also, superintendents can confuse the buffer pH with the true pH of the soil.

Last, the superintendent is the ultimate decision-maker in the entire soil-testing process. He or she needs to decide on the products to use and when to apply them. Every golf course is different and requires specific maintenance practices, therefore no standard products or recommendations can be utilized. The superintendent has two basic choices for applying products: liquid or granular. Choosing liquid or granular is easy, but deciding on the type of product (slow, quick release, sulfur coat, ammonium sulfate, urea, organic, bios, aminos, etc.) can be endless.

In conclusion, soil testing is a valuable tool for evaluating nutrient status as well as determining important chemical factors (pH imbalances, excessive Na). Interpreting soil-test results can be difficult, but understanding the processes and methods used by soil-testing labs can alleviate some of the confusion. A good soil test requires proper sampling techniques, appropriate chemical extractants, precise analysis and useful recommendations. Remember, the best soil-sample recommendations in the world are only as good as the individual comprehending them and implementing the best corrective procedures. Good luck with future testing.





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