



Except maybe for Hawaii, no place has conditions like South Florida

This past spring, the South Florida chapter hosted a meeting with Dr. James Beard on getting back to the basics in turf management. All of us need periodically to hear this information again. After all, Dr. Beard did write *Turf Management*, the book that virtually all universities and colleges use for educating turfgrass students.

As I sat glued to my seat for five hours, something kept clicking in my mind: Southern Florida does not fit into the normal mold for the textbook. I guess the rest of the country is normal; southern Florida is truly unique.

"When do you first mow your rough

down here in the springtime?" Beard asked.

"Every Monday morning," I replied.

Let's face it: we don't go into dormancy down here. Maybe a light frost now and then, but the word "dormancy" is not a part of our vocabulary. Having traveled to Arizona, Texas and California during our three most recent GCSAA conferences, I am even more convinced that the only climatic region similar to ours is Hawaii — a true bermuda-base homefield.

Our topic for this issue of the *The Florida Green* is "Winter Preparations."

Let's get to the heart of the issue: Just how do we prepare for our winters in Florida?

First, we have mowed our greens 362 times this past calendar year. That's right. There were only three days that we did not mow greens! And even though our winters seem more like an overlap of fall and spring, we still must prepare for a heavy-play — Snowbird — season. Superintendents in South Florida have gradually changed their cultural practices over the past few years to policies more consistent with Dr. Beard's lecture.

Severely scalping turfgrass has a direct effect on the depth of root growth. Mow off the leaves and the roots die back.

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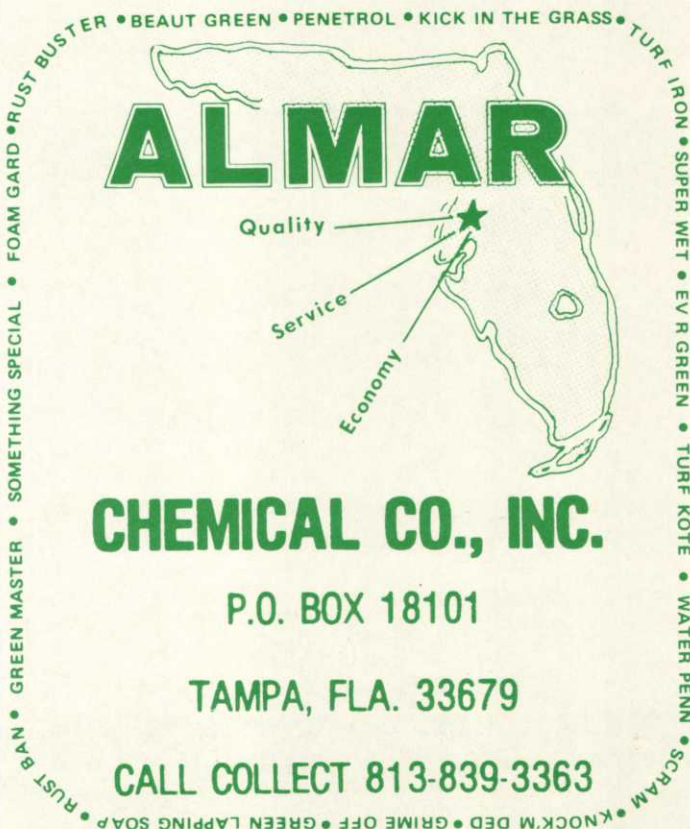
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If the members want perfection in November, then they have to give us the course for renovation in the summer...

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"Bermuda at a height of 6 inches can pass roots down to a depth of 7 feet!" says Dr. Beard. "Cut the bermudagrass back to less than one inch and you'll have less than an inch worth of roots."

Therefore, my summer projects incorporate more aerification, virtually no verticutting and absolutely no scalping.

For the past two years, we have aerified our greens five times during the summer. The tourists migrate north by the end of April and we begin "tearing up the golf course."

Our winter preparation actually commences the first of May.

We will aerify with 1/2 and 3/4-inch tines on walking-type machines for the greens, collars, green slopes, tee tops and tee slopes. No tractors or heavy equipment is used here.

Our schedule (underline indicates using DOT sand topdressing):

May: Greens, collars, green slopes, tees, tee slopes

June: Greens, collars

July: Greens, collars, green slopes, tees, cartpath wear areas, fairways, rough.

August: Greens, collars.

September: Greens, collars, green slopes, tees, tee slopes.

Let's review the benefits of the aerification program.

For the first time, 1/2-inch tines will be used without a topdressing, a practice some consider controversial. but I believe the benefits are greater to leave the holes open. An increase in the ratio of oxygen pore space to soil ultimately will decrease as the aerification soil wall deteriorates from irrigation, rainfall and surface mechanical wear. Open up the upper strata as much as possible. We should be so lucky as to create "soft greens."

Just as the greens are beginning to heal, we come right back in! For the next four months, we'll do the same thing: tear them up just when they're getting good! At my workplace, I can get away with it because we are such a seasonal club. We will not even have 110 members play for the entire summer.

I realize it's a great benefit.

If the members want perfection in the winter, they have to give us the course in the summer for renovation.

The greens are monostand Tifdwarf, the collars are planted outward to 15 feet, also with Tifdwarf. Tifton 328 bermudagrass is planted around the greens cut to a fairway height halfway down the slope. The tees, including slopes also are planted in 328. These grasses require special attention 12 months of the year. The visual and playing conditions, however, are rewarding enough to merit the maintenance hassle. It will take nearly a month to aerify all of the areas on the plan.

In June, we aerify only the greens and collars and, yes, we will topdress with enough DOT sand to virtually fill in all 3/4-inch holes. By the way, all aerification plugs will be cleaned off the greens, collars and tee tops every time. To drag the thatch across these areas will not take away the undesirable thatch.

July is much like May. By then the heavy summer rains have settled in. Topdressing the tees will be beneficial for the 328 and by this time the employees have the program down pat. Upon completion, we'll begin aerification of wear areas in the Tifton 419 bermudagrass around cart paths. We always do this operation last to reduce contamination.

August is much like June. By then the greens soil has truly been modified. Thatch is being removed and the topdressing is dragged in several directions to fill in the holes.

September is tough: it's very wet — sometimes 16 inches of rainfall — and sometimes we'll creep into October to finish the slopes.

After five months of tearing up the entire golf course, life begins to return to "normal." Our goal has been accomplished. The greens are nice and healthy, the tees almost look like greens, a winter fertilization program is now in full swing. And the crew is well aware of the long, hot winter still ahead.

After all, we will mow greens on Thanksgiving Day, Christmas and New Years. The entire crew will feel the pressure of producing a finely groomed golf course all the way through the winter until things calm down next summer.

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