

Atrazine tests on soil now can avoid mega-problems later

By TERRY BUCHEN

GALENA, Ohio — Superintendents routinely take nutrient soil tests of all topsoil that is stockpiled during construction — prior to grow-in of the new turf — to be better prepared for good agronomic practices.

One specialty soil test that is mandatory during the initial stages of golf course construction is the atrazine test — to see how much of this extremely residual herbicide is still present in the topsoil.

It is interesting to note that we had our topsoil checked at the Double Eagle Club, even though the property had not been farmed for eight years prior to course construction, and there was still atrazine detectable, though it was not enough to cause any problems in growing quality.

As a precaution, I would wholeheartedly recommend that atrazine tests routinely be taken on topsoil purchased from local sources, as many topsoil companies are purchasing topsoil from farms that are now being turned into housing developments.

Many of these former farms used atrazine right up to when they were sold and have extremely high amounts of atrazine, sometimes enough to prohibit new turf establishment.

The only sure way to eradicate atrazine from topsoil is to use methyl bromide, whose application is obviously time consuming, expensive and might not be available on the market too much longer.

After drilling test wells for our golf course a few years ago, we had irrigation-suitability tests taken and found we had an extremely high pH, high sodium levels, high sulfur (where the water smelled like rotten eggs), and an extremely high level of bicarbonates.

"Your irrigation well water source is best described as usable," stated Tom Burrows, turfgrass agronomist for Brookside Laboratories who is based in Stuart, Fla. "And you're going to have to chemically treat your water at some point in time, in the near future."

How right he was!

We had a drought during the grow-in process and used a large amount of well water to irrigate the new turf.

The more we irrigated, the more localized dry spots started to show up as the bicarbonates in the water were sealing up the top layer of the topsoil, thus not allowing water to penetrate.

Burrows recommended we install an irrigation system injector system which could treat

water with pHairway, a sulfuric acid derivative manufactured by Unocal 76.

Within a week of injecting the pHairway, we started seeing instant results as the localized dry spots started to disappear.

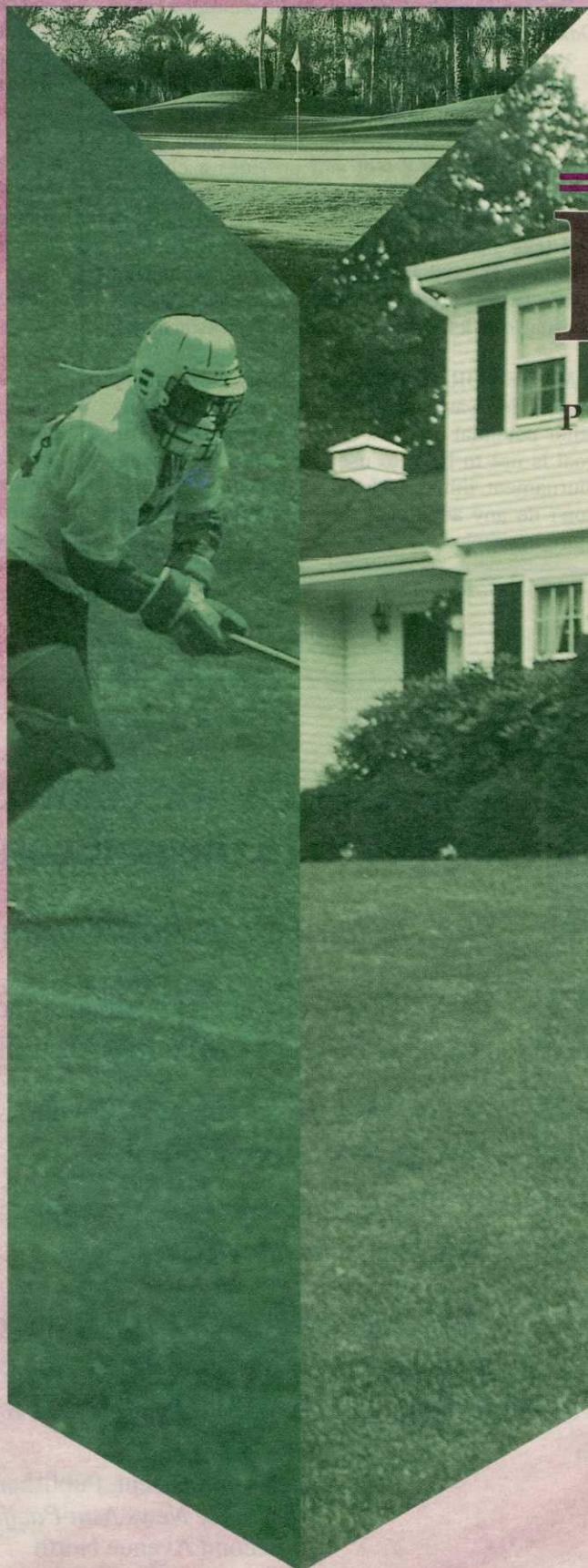
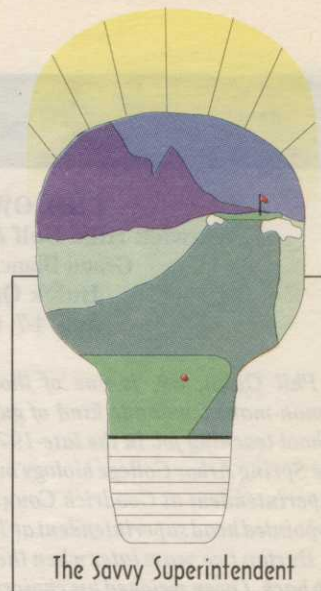
To further monitor our water treatment by injection, we started taking monthly water tests and had them analyzed by Brookside Labs.

The first monthly test was of our well water and the second

was from the treated irrigation water taken from the furthest point from our pumphouse.

Our injector system takes a constant reading of the water from our irrigation lake, then automatically calibrates how much pHairway is used, depending on what pH we tell it to treat the water to.

We usually keep the injector set at 6.5 pH and it does a great job of keeping our chemicals — in the water and out — in balance.



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Grigg on grow-in

Continued from previous page sources, accounting, writing skills, word processing and computer literacy).

"My advice is to hone up the non-agronomy skills because that's what's going to make the difference between doing a good job of coordinating a construction/grow-in job, and just being there, but not contributing to the process," he said.



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