

Super Focus

Back to nature: Wade leads return to organics

By HAL PHILLIPS

GARDEN CITY, N.Y. — Skip Wade, head superintendent at Cherry Valley Golf Club, has taken the organic lead here on Long Island, where colleagues aren't necessarily thrilled with his outspoken views on curbing chemical use.

"They thought I was crazy; they still do," said Wade. "That's why this is a positive thing. It's hard for a superintendent to change his spots. But

working with organics is the way to go. "I really think I'm going in the right direction."

So does the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA), which honored Wade with a pair of Environmental Steward awards in 1992 and '93.

So do manufacturers, who aren't backing away from this controversial superintendent. Wade has worked with The Toro Company's Huma-Gro Turf

Division, Ciba, biosys, Lesco and Ringer to develop and test organic prototypes. "I used Ringer's milky spore for grub control, the Japanese beetle," Wade said. "I haven't sprayed for that in at least five years."

So do his members, who've come to accept a golf course that isn't always tropically lush; isn't always a deep, emerald green.

And so does The New York Times, which ran a lengthy, positive story



'It's hard for a superintendent to change his spots. But working with organics is the way to go.'

— Skip Wade

(Nov. 20) featuring Wade's work with organics and composting at Cherry Valley.

"In 1988," Wade explained, "I listed all the active ingredients I used and it came to about 1,000 pounds of product. Last year I used 300."

"It's easier to get certain things accomplished with pesticides, but there's a middle ground."

Many superintendents experiment with organic programs but fall back on the tried-and-true methods when members start squawking. Wade is one of the few who've followed this path for as many as five years — so his observations carry significant weight.

Some examples:

- Red leaf spot: "I used to put down fertilizer plus fungicide in December," Wade explained. "It kept away the snow mold. When spring came around, the bentgrass would look real healthy. But then, because it gets sticky and damp in April, the red leaf would start to come in. I used to hit it with fungicides [active ingredients: chlorothalonil and iprodione]. I hit it with everything, trying to get it out of there."

"What I've discovered is, I was promoting red leaf spot by giving it too much nitrogen during the winter."

"Also, red leaf spot has a reddish look to it. As superintendents, if we don't have the course completely green, we panic. But now I live with it and just let it grow out."

- Poa annua: "Years back, I used to spray hyperodites weevils with my poa annua. I would've used an insecticide [chlorpyrifos or trichlorfon]."

"Now I don't spray for it anymore. I just let the weevils eat the poa annua. On the greens, I used a nematode from biosys. I've also experimented with eliminating the poa through overseeding with bents and ryegrasses."

- Anthracnose: "I don't even spray for it anymore," said Wade. "Anthracnose just turns poa yellow. With lower nitrogen, the problem with a yellow green weed isn't as severe a problem. If a guy is going for the green-carpet look, the problem is more severe because the contrast is so great. But if you aren't so green, it isn't as noticeable."

Wade is the first to admit he hasn't all the answers. There are many agronomic problems that will never be solved without the aid of EPA-approved herbicides, pesticides and fungicides.

"Dollar spot is the big problem," said Wade. "Because of the low nitrogen levels now, I get a lot more dollar spot. If I could figure that out, I could get that 300-pound figure way down."

Wade also acknowledges that Cherry Valley is an ideal course on which to implement an organic program. The sandy soil of Long Island helps and the 1906 Walter Travis-designed course is not carved from a dense forest.

"It's a pretty open course," Wade continued. "For a guy on the north

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CIRCLE #111

Scotts seeks nominees for excellence award

MARYSVILLE, Ohio — The Scotts Company, sponsor of The Tradition Golf Tournament, has named the selection committee for the 1995 Scotts Tradition of Excellence Award, recognizing the outstanding achievements among golf course superintendents in advancing the science of course maintenance.

The Tradition of Excellence Award will be presented at The Tradition tourney, one of the four major tournaments on the PGA Senior Tour, scheduled for March 27-31, 1995. This year, the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America was so honored.

The selection committee, composed of former GCSAA presidents, includes:

- John Spodnik of Westfield, Ohio, served as president in 1969. Recently retired from Westfield Country Club after 35 years, he

now consults for Westfield Co.

- Cliff Wagoner, CGCS, of Modesto, Calif., served as president in 1973. Retired after 35 years with Del Rio Country Club in Modesto, he currently consults on agronomic matters, most recently in Morocco and Tunisia.

- Michael Bavier, CGCS, of Barrington, Ill., served as president in 1981. He has spent the last 25 years with Inverness Golf Course of Palatine, Ill.

- Gene Baston of Augusta, Ga., served as president in 1985.

He has spent the last seven years with West Lake Country Club.

- Donald Hearn, CGCS, of Chelmsford, Mass., served as president in 1987. He's spent the last 22 years at Weston Golf Club.

- Dennis Lyon, CGCS, of Aurora, Colo., served as president in 1989. He has served 21 years with the City of Aurora as manager of golf.

"For too long, the golf course superintendent has worked behind the scenes," said Dave Heegard, Scotts vice president

of ProTurf, who also serves on the selection committee. "This award raises the visibility of the superintendent significantly, and The Tradition gives us a forum to tell the public how important the superintendent's work is."

Heegard said nominations for the award may come from anyone. Forms are available by calling Deb Strohmaier at Lord, Sullivan & Yoder, Inc. at 614-846-7777; or by calling the GCSAA's Burk Beeler at 913-841-2240.

The nominating criteria are:

1. The nominee must be employed as a superintendent.
2. Their course must be well

maintained.

3. They will have shown good teaching and mentoring qualities throughout his or her career.

4. They must be a leader, helping to further understanding of and within the profession through communication, such as speeches to organizations or writing for publications.

5. They will demonstrate environmental responsibility.

6. They will have been involved with research and innovation in cultural or management practices.

7. They will be involved professionally at the local level.

Skip Wade

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shore of Long Island, or anywhere some architect built a green in the middle of the woods, it would be harder to go organic. I don't have any really bad problems in the corners."

Remember, it was here on Long Island that hundreds of geese were allegedly killed after consuming pesticides applied at Seawane Country Club in nearby Hewlett Harbor. Like many superintendents with geese problems, Wade turned to an organic/canine solution. Instead of going with the more common border collie approach, however, he settled on a Chesapeake retriever, Hershey, who has done the job.

The Cherry Valley membership has also responded, purchasing a catalytic water conditioner, designed to make water more easily absorbed by turf and plants. According to the manufacturer — Carefree Water Conditioner of Santa Ana, Calif. — by making water "wetter", this approach can help cut irrigation by 30 percent.

Wade has also worked with the club chef, recycling an average of 2,000 pounds of kitchen waste each month. The resulting compost is used on the golf course and saves the club an average of \$15,000 per year in tipping fees.

Though he has taken some abuse, from members and colleagues, Wade hasn't been shy about spreading the organic gospel. The Times article proves that. He also speaks for the Coalition for Alternative Pesticides in New York.

In that vein, Wade will present two seminars at the upcoming GCSAA show, Feb. 24 and 25: "Reconstructing bunkers with compost" and "Cutting down on pesticides — Poa control and organics."

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