

ORGANIC FERTILIZER

BY JOHN WALSH

Let it grow

A New York superintendent sees better growth after applying organic fertilizer

The word “organic” conjures up images of doubt, at least when it comes to golf course maintenance. But Lyman Lambert, CGCS, isn’t a doubter when it comes to certain organic fertilizers. Lambert, who works at the private 18-hole Nassau Country Club in Glen Cove, N.Y., spends \$65,000 annually on granular and liquid fertilizers. He spends about \$17,000 on Growth Products’ Pro-Formance Ultra, Essential, Companion, Re-Store Plus (which all have organics or are all organic), in addition to Calcium Chelate and Xtra Iron. He spends about \$5,000 on I-Mol, a molasses-based product by From the Ground Up that feeds microbes and leads to the decomposition of thatch, and about \$43,000 on granular fertilizer from

Andersons Golf Products.

To put Lambert’s operation in perspective, his maintenance budget is \$1.5 million, and his staff consists of 21 people during the summer and six during the winter. The club hosts an amateur major event, annual the Nassau Invitational, and various Long Island and Metropolitan Golf Association tournaments every year or two. The turfgrass at Nassau is a *Poa annua*/bentgrass mix on the greens, tees and fairways, and the rough is a mix of bluegrass, ryegrass and *Poa*.

Unlike other areas of New York, Lambert says there are fewer regulations for pesticide use, but regulations aren’t solely the reason for his use of organic fertilizers. He uses organic fertilizers because he achieves his

desired quality of turf with the combination of granular and liquid fertilizers, as well as organic amendments. He previously used granular fertilizer more heavily because he believed organics were just snake-oil products. Now he believes there’s a place for organics in the industry but doesn’t think organics alone can produce great quality turf.

On the greens, which are triple-cut daily, Lambert uses a synthetic granular fertilizer (Anderson 13-2-26 or 18-9-18) four times a year and organic liquid fertilizers every two weeks, along with Primo plant growth regulator throughout the season. In the spring, he applies the granular fertilizer twice to kick-start greens growth. Then he switches to a liquid fertilizer plus organic amendments,

Lyman Lambert, CGCS, says his fertilizer applications help suppress anthracnose. Photo: Nassau Country Club



ORGANIC FERTILIZER

Lambert is experimenting with fertilizer applications late in the year and is seeing more root growth come spring. Photo: Nassau Country Club



calcium and iron, which he applies every two weeks. In August, he makes another application of granular fertilizer while continuing the liquid fertilizer applications. In the fall, he makes the fourth granular fertilizer application.

In the fairways, granular applications are made every six weeks, and liquid fertilizer applications with organic amendments, calcium and iron are made every two weeks.

In the rough, granular fertilizer is applied three or four times a year. No liquid fertilizer is applied in this area.

Liquid applications, which are considered spoon-feeding, are made with Toro boom sprayers using fan nozzles because they push the fertilizer down into the thatch layer, Lambert says. The fan nozzle is better than the nozzles that apply product in bubble form, he says. Any time the turf looks weak, there might be additional liquid fertilizer with organic amendments applied to try and strengthen it.

Lambert, who became a superintendent in 1986, makes his fertilizer applications early in the morning after the grass is cut because the crew needs to get out of the golfers' way. Four sprayers go out – two 160-gallon units on the greens and two 300-gallon units on the fairways. If there's downtime after the greens are completed, the tees are fertilized.

If there's no down time, the tees are fertilized the next day.

After all fertilizer applications, Lambert posts signs on the first and 10th tees and in the pro shop to alert members about them.

Lambert, who has been at Nassau since 1984, credits his fertilizer program with helping suppress disease.

"I used to be worried about anthracnose," he says. "We're a busy club with a lot of traffic, and the carts don't have much place to go. So I need to keep the grass growing to avoid anthracnose. We have had a little bit of anthracnose on one green and on one fairway. Other than that, I don't see it."

Aside from Companion and Essential Plus, which include amino acid and gibberellic acid, Lambert is testing a new product from Growth Products called Performance 18-3-6, a synthetic fertilizer with organic ingredients as well as soy bean extract, which is supposed to make bentgrass grow sideways and help fill in areas.

Lambert started using liquid fertilizer about 10 years ago and Growth Products fertilizer five years ago. He takes advantage of the company's early-order program and purchases all the liquid fertilizer in December. He purchases the granular fertilizer from The Andersons in December as well.

"This year, because the price of fertilizer

has increased, I bought all the fertilizer I need for next year at once, and I'll store the granular fertilizer," he says. "Usually, they bring it to me throughout the year. But the Growth Products fertilizer is delivered throughout the year as I need it, starting in the spring."

Overall, Lambert is satisfied with his fertilizer program, although he is trying to improve his green downtime after aerification.

"I've had a problem with aerification holes not closing up fast enough to get the greens back into play, so I'm experimenting with using some products after we aerify," he says. "I apply eight ounces of Pro-Formance Ultra with Companion, Essential and Xtra Iron before and after aerifying to help close the holes faster."

Lambert star tines his greens throughout the season, which leaves turf plants weak. He plans to apply different amounts of liquid fertilizers and organic combinations before star tining to keep plant vigor up to improve recovery.

Lambert also is experimenting with applying Companion and Essential together late in the season, around December. As a result, he has seen tremendous root growth in the spring.

"They're the best roots I've ever seen," he says. **GCI**