

Without question, the most significant observation I've made during the recent recession is this: Those clubs that continued to move forward, that kept enhancing their facilities and improving their clubs intelligently were able to weather the storm.

**5 AN ENVIRONMENT OF MUTUAL RESPECT.** There are some clubs where members don't merely disrespect staff, they simply don't respect each other. Such clubs become a revolving door. Members come and go. Facilities decline and sometimes the club fails. It's essential for all clubs to foster a pleasant and friendly environment so that new members (and guests) feel comfortable. This is the job of both club leadership and staff, and it's the backbone of effective club programming. Club leadership needs to be willing to get rid of the rotten eggs – even in times of challenging membership development. But here the financial planning aspect come back to the fore. Mutual sacrifice and investment engenders esprit de corps among members. They're in it together. By the same token, cost-cutting engenders an "every man for himself" mentality, which makes mutual respect almost impossible.

**6 QUALITY, PROFESSIONAL STAFF.** A great club has a great staff – PERIOD. Without good food and beverage staff, members won't eat there. Without good course conditions (superintendent and crew) the club gets a poor reputation, internally and externally. Without a good golf pro, that operation suffers. All of these require a capable and diligent General Manager – without one, you don't have the makings of a good club. Clubs need good facilities but they are really about finding, training and retaining good people. The prospective member sees the staff long before they get to know the members.

**7 QUALITY FOOD & BEVERAGE.** As soon as the food and beverage quality at a club declines, so does the members' use of the golf course. It really doesn't take rocket science to figure this one out.

**8 STRONG FAMILY PROGRAMS.** The club of the 21st Century is for the most part a club for the family. Without attracting Mom and the kids, Dad can't/won't join, can't/won't view his dues as a long-term investment on behalf of his family. Fitness, kids programs and a sound family environment (not the elimination of adult fun, but the maintenance of clear boundaries between the adult, family and kids' environments) are essential to the success of most clubs today.

**9 FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT.** This is where I started, and it's where I'll finish because it's really the most important building block for successful clubs. Some clubs simply think avoiding spending money is sound financial management. It's important to know when not to spend – but also when to spend/invest. I've observed many clubs that, in an effort to keep dues low, have neglected facilities, equipment and quality staffing. They've initiated a long, slow death spiral. Board members hate going to the grille room after a dues increase but that's no reason to kick responsible decision-making down the road.

Four years ago, just when the economic climate was nearing rock bottom, I wrote an article on this subject for the National Club Association, "It's All About Value." Check it out. The prescription hasn't changed much and, unfortunately, the behavior of many clubs hasn't changed enough.

What has changed? It's simply more incumbent on clubs today to ensure their future success. The economic climate and competitive situation demand it. The modern member demands more value for her/his recreational dollar. **GCI**

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BY JUANG-HORNG "JC" CHONG

## A witch's brew of troubles with the Bermudagrass mite

Bermudagrass stunt mites are an increasing turfgrass problem at golf facilities with bermudagrass fairways and roughs.

As an entomologist and extension specialist, I usually have recommendations (if not solutions) to most insect problems. But for the past few years, the Bermudagrass mite, also known as the Bermudagrass stunt mite, has severely bruised my ego.

Never heard of the Bermu-

dagrass mite? Well, you are not alone. Whenever I show a picture of the typical "witch's broom" damage (Image 1) in South Carolina or Texas, I can see eyes widening and heads nodding. Many golf facilities in the southern U.S. may be infested, but few superintendents, managers and owners

recognize the damage. Many think that those bunchy stems are just mutations.

The Bermudagrass mite is a species of eriophyid mite. The characteristics of the eriophyid mites, as a group, are their small size – a Bermudagrass mite is about the size of the full stop, or period, at the end of this

sentence – banana-shaped body, and two pairs of legs (as opposed to four pairs on typical mites and three pairs on typical insects). The Bermudagrass mite is whitish cream in color or translucent, as seen in Image 2. A large number feed under the leaf sheath, causing stunted internodes and a typical



Image 1. Infestation by the Bermudagrass mite stunts stem growth in common and hybrid Bermudagrass, causing the characteristic "witch's broom" symptom in stem (left) and the entire tuft (right).



Image 2. Adult Bermudagrass mites are tiny, with a banana-shaped body, two pairs of legs, and a whitish cream or translucent color. Eggs are oval and translucent.



Image 3. As stunting and death of stems and stolons continue, the turf fails to recover from the damage and bare spots begin to appear. The stunted tufts are quite noticeable.

witch's broom symptom (Image 1). Because of their small size, color and habit of feeding under the leaf sheath, individual Bermudagrass mites are extremely difficult to see even with a hand lens. The witch's broom damage is a more reliable diagnostic characteristic.

A few years may pass before the number of witch's brooms reaches a noticeable level. The witch's broom formation is permanent, and the infestation causes the stunted stolons even under higher fertilization and irrigation levels. Over time, turfgrass stems and stolons die. The stunting and death of stems and stolons leave behind bare spots (Image 3), which continue to expand and coalesce as more stems and stolons are stunted and killed (Image 4). The end result is a large patch of bare soil or weeds. The damage appears to be most severe on slopes and

at the edges of bunkers, indicating a correlation between the severity of damage and soil dryness at a particular spot.

**AN INCREASING TURFGRASS PROBLEM.** "Why are they becoming more problematic?" is a question I am asked often. The Bermudagrass mite has been with us for a very long time. It is believed that it originated in Australia and spread around the world with the shipment of Bermudagrass to other countries. The first case of Bermudagrass mite infestation in the U.S. was reported in a lawn in Phoenix, Ariz., in 1959. In 1962, it was found in Florida. Now it is widespread in most states south of the 35° N latitude.

Historically, Bermudagrass mites have only been an occasional pest of Bermudagrass. The recent gain in notoriety may be the result of better education

of superintendents. It also could be the result of reduced rainfall in recent years or changes in irrigation practices, as evidenced by the fact that the problem is more pronounced during dry times or in dry locations. It could be changes in rough mowing practices, because as the mowing height is raised, the damage becomes more noticeable on longer stems. It could be changes in pest management practices, because as some pesticides that have good efficacy against the Bermudagrass mite are phased out or restricted, pressure is reduced on the mite population. It could be changes in Bermudagrass cultivar selection. For instance, the popular fairway cultivar Tifway is very susceptible. Or, it could simply be bad timing, because as the turf ages the damage becomes more noticeable. As with most pest problems, the recent flare-up of Bermudagrass mites is most likely the result of a combination of several factors.

Those unlucky few who have to manage the damaged turf

soon realize there are no effective management options against the Bermudagrass mite. We know so little about this pest that it is almost impossible to formulate an effective management program at the moment.

**IDENTIFICATION TIPS AND DETERMINING THRESHOLD LEVELS.** The first step in any management program is to determine the causal agent of the damage. The thinning of turf can be caused by several factors, and damage by Bermudagrass mite is often misdiagnosed as mutation or nematode infestation. Therefore, it is always a good idea to collect samples of live witch's brooms. Samples should be sealed in a plastic bag and sent to local extension offices or extension specialists for identification.

The next step is to determine the threshold at which management action becomes necessary. Dr. David Shetlar and Dr. Harry Niemczyk of The Ohio State University developed a sampling protocol for the Bermudagrass mite. A 3- x

## Editor's Note

This article first appeared in the July 12, 2013 issue of the Green Section Record (Vol. 51, 14). It's reprinted with permission.



Image 4. As damage continues, the bare spots expand and coalesce, creating a large area of bare soil. The damage appears to be most severe on slopes where water distribution is not even.

4-foot rectangular frame is constructed with PVC pipes. Inside the frame, strings are threaded through holes drilled into the PVC pipes at 1-foot intervals, creating 12 grids. The frame is then placed onto infested turf and the total number of witch's brooms in 10 of the 12 grids is counted. Samples should be taken once a month from every 50 feet on fairways and roughs, four frame samples from each green approach, and two frame samples from each tee bank. If four or more witch's brooms are found in each sample, a chemical control program should

be initiated. If less than four damaged stems are found, then a cultural control program may be sufficient. It is not clear if the sampling protocol and threshold have been verified in the field.

#### CHEMICAL MANAGEMENT TIPS.

There is currently no effective pesticide against the Bermudagrass mite. In 2009 and 2010, I conducted field trials at a golf facility in Hilton Head Island, S.C., to evaluate the efficacy of 26 active ingredients and products, with or without a surfactant (Dyne-Amic®),

against the Bermudagrass mite. Many active ingredients or products were not registered for use on turfgrass but were selected because of their activity on various mite species on ornamental plants. The results were disappointing (Figure 1). Diazinon (Diazinon 4E at 1 pint per 100 gallons) reduced the number of witch's brooms by 43 percent after one application in May, followed by chlorpyrifos (Dursban Pro at 1.5 fluid ounces per 1,000 square feet) by 25 percent, abamectin (Avid 0.15EC at 0.09 fluid ounces per 1,000 square feet) by 23 percent, and

dicofol (Kelthane 50 WSP at 0.366 ounces per 1,000 square feet) by 22 percent. The results were not close to 85 percent reduction, which I consider to be good efficacy.

The results from my study are surprisingly similar to those generated by Dr. George Butler (University of Arizona) and Dr. Jim Reinert (then at University of Florida) in the 1960s to 1980s and summarized by Dr. Reinert in an article published in the USGA Green Section Record in 1982 called *The Bermudagrass Stunt Mite*. The active ingredients that provided good or decent reduction in these earlier studies were Diazinon, UC-55248, oxamyl (Vydate), aldicarb (Temik), propoxur (Baygon), and chlorpyrifos (Dursban). The most effective active ingredient against the Bermudagrass mite, Diazinon, has been phased out. The uses of chlorpyrifos and dicofol in golf courses have been greatly restricted. Abamectin is restricted to the management of nematodes on golf course putting greens.

What other chemical management options do we have? What is the efficacy of other active ingredients registered for the management of mites? The Bermudagrass mite feeds deep within the leaf sheath, so would the addition of a penetrant, surfactant, or oil increase efficacy of existing pesticides? What about different types or brands of surfactants? Does a higher spray volume help penetrate the leaf sheath? How frequently do we have to repeat the application? We do not have answers to any of these questions.

#### CULTURAL MANAGEMENT TIPS.

One of the biggest obstacles to developing an effective management program is our lack of understanding of Bermudagrass

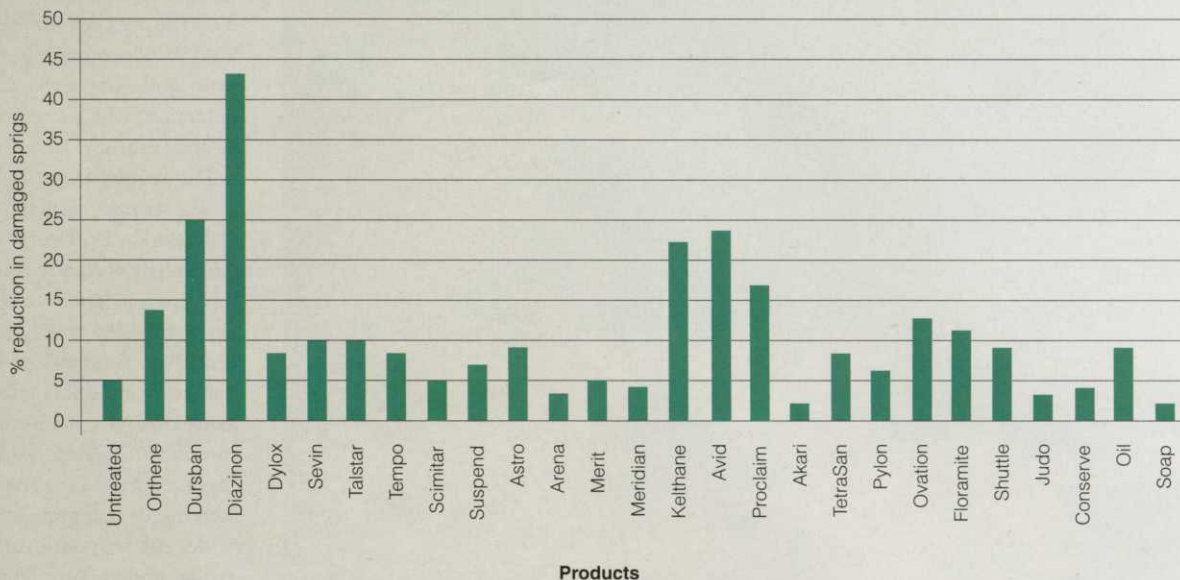


Figure 1. The percent reduction in the number of “witch’s brooms” one month after one application of selected insecticides and miticides at a golf course in Hilton Head Island, S.C., in 2009.

mite biology. The complete life cycle from egg to adult is five to 10 days, and it is faster with higher temperatures. Each female produces a dozen eggs. The population is usually active in late spring and summer. However, the location and life stage in which the Bermudagrass mite overwinters, as well as the timing of the population emerging from overwintering and beginning to cause turfgrass damage, are not known. Not knowing its biology, it is difficult to determine the timing of pesticide applications to get ahead of the population and damage.

Because damage is most noticeable on longer stems, lowering mowing height may help remove many infested stems. It is possible that scalping, in addition to vacuuming of clippings, may remove most of the infested stems. A higher fertilization and irrigation level after scalping may allow recovery of infected turf. Even when scalping is not used, an increased

irrigation volume may help lightly infested turf outgrow some damage. Fertilization can also be a double-edged sword. On one hand, fertilization can promote growth and recovery. On the other hand, higher nitrogen levels have been linked to larger and more damaging populations of mites.

It is also important to remember that the Bermudagrass mite spreads within a golf course by hitching a ride on clippings. Therefore, sanitation of mowing equipment after working in an infested area is crucial in delaying the spread. Blowing clippings after mowing can also spread populations to other turf areas. There are no experimental or even anecdotal data to suggest that any of the cultural control tactics work.

**ADDITIONAL RESEARCH NEEDS.** Host plant resistance presents the most promising aspect of Bermudagrass mite management. The Bermudagrass mite attacks only common and

hybrid Bermudagrass. Therefore, for a severely infested golf course, replanting with zoysiagrass or other suitable turfgrass species may be a good, if costly, alternative. Bermudagrass cultivars vary in their susceptibility to the Bermudagrass mite. As summarized in 1982 by Dr. Reinert in *The Bermudagrass Stunt Mite*, some of the popular cultivars, such as Tifway, TifEagle, and common Bermudagrass, are susceptible, while Tifdwarf, TifSport, Franklin, and Midiron provide good resistance. Bermudagrass putting greens are not an issue for Bermudagrass mite damage. The ultra-low mowing height on greens makes it uninhabitable for the Bermudagrass mite. It is time to conduct new research to evaluate the potential of newer Bermudagrass cultivars, such as Celebration, which has a more aggressive growth habit, to resist or outgrow mite damage.

**CONCLUSION.** We have not made much progress in managing the

Bermudagrass mite in the past three decades. In fact, we may have taken a few steps backward with the phasing out of several effective pesticides, a continuing ignorance of the Bermudagrass mite’s biology and the efficacy of new active ingredients, and the lack of development of resistant Bermudagrass cultivars and management practices. This witches’ brew of problems demands more attention and resources from the golf industry. I am a firm believer that as great as the challenge may be, our drive and ingenuity can help us find a way out of the trouble. **GCI**

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### For more...

To read the report Dr. James A. Reinert’s *The Bermudagrass Stunt Mite* (1982), enter [bit.ly/1aIK3WE](http://bit.ly/1aIK3WE) into your browser.

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## Travels With Terry

Globetrotting consulting agronomist Terry Buchen visits many golf courses annually with his digital camera in hand. He will share helpful ideas relating to maintenance equipment from the golf course superintendents he visits – as well as a few ideas of his own – with timely photos and captions that explore the changing world of golf course management.

### GRASS DEFLECTOR:

The Jacobsen Eclipse 322 Triplex Mower is used for the tees and fairways at the Wamego Country Club in Wamego, Kan., where Trampis Nickel is the superintendent and Randy Eichelberger is the equipment manager. Since grass catchers are not used, the center reel was used to spray a 4-to-6-inch pile of grass clippings all over the operator's feet. Not anymore, as this unique grass deflector was designed and built by Eichelberger. It is built using  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch angle iron with a piece of  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch industrial rubber that is bolted in place, which is the width of the reel. The  $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch steel couplings, which are welded to the angle iron, slip over the grass catcher brackets to hold it in place. It took about an hour to build and it costs less than \$50 for parts and materials.



### WELDING TABLE:

The top portion was formerly a storm drainage grate with  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch steel slats spaced approximately 1.5 inches apart.

The legs, support frame and top edge around the grate are 3-inch angle iron with  $\frac{1}{16}$ -inch flat steel – all welded in place – with a 4-inch vice bolted on. Two-inch caster wheels are welded onto each leg for portability. There is a removal "catch pan" placed over the intersection of the support frame that is filled with water to cool the slag from the welding operation as a safety measure, which is held in place with 1-inch angle iron. The materials were either purchased or were recycled and the total cost was less than \$200. The labor time took about five hours.

Former equipment mechanic Fred Pickering designed and built it. Jason Bazuin is the superintendent and Tim Berner is the head mechanic at The Club at Seven Canyons in Sedona Ariz.



(VINCHESI continued from page 26)

based and the block zoning of the small sprinklers watered the tees top and a great deal of surrounding tee area that was both sloped and a heavy soil all together. The tees were mostly elevated and therefore windy. The trees were very dry from a combination of poor sprinkler spacing and small nozzles that allows the water to be easily blown around.

Lastly, we visited a small practice facility operated by the Columbia Federation of Golf. This inexpensive public facility consisted of several practice putting greens, a driving range, a golf school and a par-3 course. The facility was also being used as an educational facility to teach several interns about golf course maintenance. The irrigation on this facility was very rudimentary, consisting of residential products with some automatic (not working) and manual irrigation. There was a small pump system and not enough water. But again with the kikuyugrass it was in pretty good shape.

Like most countries, golf in Columbia is very diverse with old established clubs and new resort courses. Qualified help is an issue and maintenance practices are behind the times. The use of chemicals and drainage and irrigation systems are rare due to availability and cost, but the golf course superintendents and foreman are eager to learn. During the seminars there were lots of questions both in the classroom and out in the field.

I have been to a lot of high end golf courses in the United States over the years and many private country clubs with lots of amenities. The Lagartus Club in Bogota where the seminar was held is very high end and with your typical country club services including: golf, swimming, tennis, squash, bowling, fitness center, practice area, short game area and several restaurants. However, Lagartus had an amenity I had never seen attached to a country club before. That was competitive water skiing on their irrigation lake, complete with a marked out course and a scoring building on the shore. Something to bring up as a possibility at your next board meeting? **GCI**



(BRAUER continued from page 36)

from new path to the old, when the old section breaks up, so we try the next section... and sometimes the next section, etc.

**Turf.** On most renovations, we try to minimize turf destruction and replanting. This cuts cost, but leaves noticeable seams between old to new turf. Once seen, many prefer new turf be taken out to logical stopping points for consistency. Also, I can't recall a project where everyone didn't want more sod than was specified.

Most projects follow the proverbial desire for "champagne on a beer budget." Thirty six years of experience has taught me to be smart and plan on spending 10-20 percent more than the client really wants to get the product they really want and need. Very few projects get built exactly as per plan, and most changes increase costs over causing "pleasant" budget surprises.

Conscientious project teams continually balance between construction cost, project quality, and future maintenance or additional construction costs. They also realize that things just tend to come up and plan for the unplanned. **GCI**

(DELOZIER continued from page 48)

2013, according to the Census and Department of Commerce statistics.

Consider two additional important impacts on golf:

- Golf participation will increase in areas with a growing concentration of homebuyers above the age of 50.
- Market radials (the distance radius that feeds a facility) are shrinking due to over-supply of courses.

How should those of us in the golf business react to the changes in the housing market?

- Monitor housing trends that favor new construction and neighborhood resurgence in your area and market to new residents.
- Because of the shorter drive-time to the nearest course, loyalty programs that reward repeat business have new importance. Evaluate yours to make sure it's appealing to new customers and rewarding to your business.
- Research your close-in market to understand its demographics and see where your facility makes the strongest connection with residents. Identify your facility's strengths and most attractive features. Then focus your communications to take best advantage of your marketing budget.

The rising tide of a stronger housing economy may not lift all boats, but it can lift yours if you plan ahead. **GCI**



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## TIM THE TWEETMAN

**G**CI has been on Twitter for at least five years. We have nearly 2,700 followers and we've fired close to 5,000 140-character missives into cyberspace, including exclusive breaking news items, live coverage of events, award-winning articles, pithy observations and the best tweets from our friends. We have a group of editors who spend a lot of time and effort doing social media well to create conversation in the market and drive readership of our content.

Our pal Tim Moraghan (@Tim-Moraghan), by contrast, has been on Twitter for about a year, has a couple of hundred followers and has sent fewer than 500 tweets. Tim is not exactly Mr. Social Media, but he does it occasionally when his full-time job of helping golf facilities perform better isn't keeping him way too busy.

Yet, at the end of July, he fired off one powerful message that had (at press time) been retweeted more than 40 times. This is at least double the number of the much-coveted retweets we "professionals" have ever achieved over the course of many more years and ten times more tweets.

Here's what Tim fired off into the Twitterverse the morning of July 30:

"In our profession turf loss due to extreme weather should not equal GCS job loss. All board members, GMs and golf pros hear me on this."

In short, Tim – a respected industry authority with street cred earned over a couple decades of setting up USGA championships – said what every superintendent hopes his or her boss will understand when weather-related stress coincides with high expectations. For many, that time is right now.

Here's what clubs and employers need to understand: Superintendents are highly dedicated, well-educated

and thoughtful stewards of the land who, under normal circumstances can provide amazing playing fields for the wonderful game of golf. They are not, however, alchemists who can magically change the physical properties of plants to make them withstand the brutality of Mother Nature when she's pissed off.

It is flat-out wrong to fire someone because of the unpredictable and unpreventable whims of weather. Tim the Tweetman Moraghan is 100 percent right and I hope that other credible voices will chime in to support him.

But here's the thing: I think the number of supers who actually get fired because "golfers don't get it" is way smaller than it used to be. My sense is that decades of education among club officials, owners and others who hold the employment fate of supers in their hands has helped. Awareness of the role you play in the economic success of facilities is sky-high compared to even 15 years ago. The USGA, in particular, has become a vocal cheerleader for supers. We've shed the greenkeeper thing completely and moved into a new and increasingly envious stature in the industry. It seems counterintuitive but the recent Great Recession made superintendents greater in importance and value within the golf management hierarchy.

Don't get me wrong... I know astoundingly dumb, arbitrary and just plain goofy terminations happen a lot. There are still plenty of dumbass bosses out there who'll can a guy because the bunkers don't drain fast enough after a hundred-year flood. You can't fix stupid, even when it's wearing a tailored Ralph Lauren blazer and a rep tie.

But let's be honest. Sometimes the "weather-related firing" has only a little to do with the weather. It's really prob-

ably one of three things:

1. It's the straw that broke the camel's back. Over a string of consecutive years, little things have gone wrong and the super has gradually lost support. Then the grumbling turns into a pink slip when the turf checks out because of crazy summer heat.

2. They sense a convenient opportunity. They're looking for a reason to make a change and an out-of-nowhere explosion of Pythium gives them one. Usually the super has an enemy amongst the leadership and they're just biding their time till some grass dies.

3. They want a divorce because they've fallen in love with someone new. Face it, it's a buyer's market for agronomic talent and there are hundreds of folks who'll gladly fill any good job.

Scratch the surface of many summertime terminations and you'll find one of these underlying causes lurking. I bet Tim will agree with that as much as I agree with the original sentiment of his tweet.

I'll bow to guys like Tim and Bruce Williams when it comes to giving advice about how to avoid becoming vulnerable to one of those three situations except to say that good communications before, during and after the crisis is critical. Document what you're doing, explain things in clear, simple terms and be absolutely honest about the situation. If the worst still happens, at least you can take solace in the fact you did your best and told the truth.

Tim's message resonated because it's crunch time. All those retweets were like little prayers to the golf gods for some peace of mind during the toughest weeks of the year. It's a terrible thing to be fighting nature and fighting for your livelihood at the same time. My wish to you, my friends, is that you never have to do it. **GCI**