

Turfgrass Questions Answered

By FRED D. GRAU

THE RESPONSE to the Turfgrass Q and A has been gratifying. Many questions have been received and each one has been answered by mail. Many questions that came as a result of the August GOLFDOM have been selected for this month's column. In some cases there has been slight editorial revision of the question to increase the clarity but without changing the meaning.

It is a real pleasure to be able to answer the questions of those seeking factual information. In some cases we would be able to answer more exactly if we knew the kind of grass, the type of soil, the intensity of use and other specific information. Please include pertinent details with your questions.

Recent publicity on Merion bluegrass has brought many questions on this improved turfgrass. Even though you may not have questions to ask, your experiences with Merion will be welcome.

The tremendous development of new and improved warm-season grasses has created a new series of problems for many who previously have worked only with the cool-season grasses. The shift from cool-season feeding to fertilizing in the heat of summer has been a major change in recent years. The trend to close mowing has received added emphasis as we grow more of those grasses which virtually demand tight mowing.

New cool-season grasses are being developed and released for public use. Each grass will demand careful study so that its management requirements most nearly can be met. If, through this column, we can assist in minimizing mistakes in establishment and maintenance, our efforts shall have been worthwhile.

Q—What mixture of soil, sand and peat would you recommend for topdressing of creeping bent greens? (Ohio)

A—Extensive surveys have indicated that the 1-1-1 mixture of loam soil, coarse sand and peat is used more widely than any other. Where soils are heavy there is a definite trend toward a 1-2-1 mixture.

The sand should be as coarse as possible, even including fine gravel, just so that the largest particles do not interfere with the putting surface of the green. Well-rotted sawdust might be used in place of peat where this material is available. The clay content of the mixture should not exceed 8%-10% and the silt content should be less than 5% if possible. Topdressing high in silt invariably results in excessive compaction.

Q—How often should greens be mowed to maintain a good putting surface? (Illinois)

A—Every day.

Q—How often should cups be changed? (New York)

A—Where play is heavy cups should be changed every day. Where play is light the interval might be 2-3 days. Leaving a cup too long results in excessive compaction, puddling and weakening of the grass, encouraging invasion of poa and clover.

Q—At our club we have been discussing the question of how often to aerify. We have creeping bent greens, Bermuda tees and mixed bent-bluegrass fairways. (Michigan)

A—Creeping bent greens can be aerified once every 4-6 weeks as a regular practice. However, this activity should be confined to the season when the bent is growing actively so that the holes will heal rapidly.

Bermuda tees should be aerified once a month and again only during the active growing season. This schedule on both greens and tees can be followed because moisture control is possible.

On unwatered bent-bluegrass fairways the time of aerifying must coincide with proper moisture content to achieve maximum penetration and benefits. Aerifying twice in spring and twice in fall, the aerifications about a month apart, is considered sound practice on many courses. In some instances fairways are aerified every 4-6 weeks.

Q—We have been told that early morning hand-watering will help us reduce

disease on bent greens. How do you feel about this? (Kentucky)

A—Careful research conducted over 20 years ago answered that question and told us that greens hand-watered in the early morning had much less disease, everything else being equal. Watering in the evening keeps the grass wet and favors the growth of fungi that cause disease. This is especially true when nights are humid.

Q—If we are continually removing grain and thatch from greens can we expect to find better results from our fungicides? (Pa.)

A—Leading pathologists say definitely that by removing the older portions of grass blades and stems the development of disease is retarded. By removing thatch and grain, far better coverage and penetration of fungicides is achieved. Therefore, regardless of the method by which you reduce grain or thatch you can anticipate better results from fungicides, which is the first step in sanitation.

Q—We have been aerifying our Tiffine bermuda greens regularly and we have been throwing away the grass that we sweep up afterwards. Somebody told us we could plant this material and it will grow. Have you had any experience with this? (Louisiana)

A—Superintendents at many courses are carefully preserving material from all improved greens following aerifying. They spread it out on a prepared nursery bed or on a cultivated patch of approach, tee or fairway that needs attention. The usual practice is to roll, topdress, roll again and water. Invariably this material quickly heals and thin places are established to a new turf of improved grass, at a minimum of cost and attention.

Q—What is your opinion of chemical soil conditioners? (Virginia)

A—Manufacturers of soil conditioners agree that a particular soil condition can only be stabilized by the use of a conditioner. This means then that its use on a soil in poor physical condition will only perpetuate that condition. Tests are still being conducted to determine the usefulness of conditioners applied on the surface of established turf areas. In general, this use is not being recommended. Mixing soil conditioners with prepared topdressing in excellent physical condition seems to be increasing in popularity. It would appear that the use of chemical soil conditioners further emphasizes the need for close attention to all of the devices, chem-

ical, physical, and mechanical, which help to create desirable physical soil conditions.

Q—Can you say anything good about Johnsongrass? (Ohio)

A—It depends on where the Johnsongrass is growing. In a field of corn or in the roughs on a golf course or in the nursery, it can be a terrible nuisance. In a pasture under proper management you can find many good things to say about it. We have noticed that where it is closely mowed and at frequent intervals it cannot survive, particularly when it receives heavy competition from dense, well-fertilized adapted turgresses.

Q—What is the best way to establish Bermuda into established fairways by seed? (Miss.)

A—If the fairways must be seeded with common Bermuda seed, the best way to get it established would be to aerify several times, each time in a different direction. Do this in the spring when the soil is warm so that Bermuda seed will germinate promptly. Usually this is soon after corn or cotton planting time.

Dragging the fairway after aerifying will partially fill the holes so that the seed will find favorable germinating places in the crevices but will not be buried too deeply.

I would suggest, however, that before spending money on a Bermuda seeding program you investigate the availability and cost of planting an adapted, improved strain of Bermuda by vegetative methods. The end results might be much more to your liking. All of the improved Bermudas must be planted vegetatively as there is no seed available.

Q—I've been developing zoysia in my nursery for several years and now that I have some zoysia sod I would like to have suggestions as to how to use it. (Ga.)

A—One of the best uses for your zoysia sod will be on your Bermuda tees where the shade is too heavy for best growth of Bermuda. Zoysia is considerably more shade tolerant than Bermuda. I would recommend solid sodding.

Q—What is the best strain of bent for greens in Cincinnati?

A—Several strains of creeping bentgrass are performing well in the Cincinnati area. They include Washington, Arlington and Congressional bents, Old Orchard, Cohansey, Penncross and Pennlu. There also are some unknown and unnamed strains that are performing well once their management requirements have been understood and met. I doubt if any-