

# Turfgrass Questions Answered

By FRED V. GRAU

Dr. Grau will welcome questions on course maintenance subjects from superintendents, green chairmen, club and public course officials. There is no charge or obligation attached to this service. Address Queries—Grau, Golfdom, 407 S. Dearborn St., Chicago 5, Ill.

**G**OLF courses are looked to as the turfgrass proving grounds of the world today. A new product put forth for use at any area where turfgrass of high quality is desired cannot claim to have been proven until it has been accepted for practical use on a golf course.

The golf courses also are the show windows of everything required for the production and maintenance of fine turfgrass, whether for sports or residential or commercial use or other beautification and utility.

This vast and sharp focus of public inspection on the golf course superintendents' work, and the superintendents' powerful and far-reaching influence on the marketing of everything needed for growing and retaining fine turfgrass, has placed a heavy professional responsibility on the men who manage golf courses.

During World War II when it became apparent to military leaders that grass was a strategic engineering material, many golf course superintendents were called upon to assist in far-flung grassing projects. It is a credit to the profession that superintendents were able to convert and translate their knowledge of peacetime pursuits into something of great military value.

Seeds and stolons and sprigs of almost every grass that has or is believed to have turf value have been planted at one time or another on golf courses. Here they have been subjected to tremendous variations in soils, climate and management. Here only the hardiest survive to be called superior.

Machines designed for the maintenance of turfgrass areas receive the "acid test" on the golf course.

Those that are accepted and used regularly very soon are adapted for use on other areas for other turf interests. It has been said "the development and main-

tenance of a putting green represents the highest form of agriculture".

Golf course tees are similar in many respects to athletic fields where cleated shoes and constant trampling render grass growing difficult, to say the least. Fairways are closely akin to the kind of lawns that millions of folks would like to have. The rough on the golf course is like the city park, the highway strips or the local airfield in many respects.

The golf course superintendent can be secure in the knowledge that even though his authoritative position may not be publicly acknowledged and appreciated, millions of people depend upon the kind of practical grass information that he has helped to develop and accumulate.

**Q—I am a doctor and on occasions when I have free time I would like to be able to do some practice putting in my backyard. How do you build a backyard putting green? (Del.)**

**A—**The first thing to do is to consult with a local golf course superintendent who is the authority on putting greens in the area. The superintendent can look over the site and see if the location is suitable, if the soil is favorable, and other technical details.

Cost of establishing and maintenance may be important. In a few cases the superintendent may let one of his workmen care for the green after hours. If the green is to be bentgrass, the details of fertilizing, watering, mowing and spraying for diseases are too much for the layman and should be handled by the best professional turfgrass man—the golf course superintendent.

It may be possible that the local golf course may have a nursery of putting green sod which could be moved intact to produce the putting green quickly. To

grow it from bent stolons or seed would take the better part of a year.

If the green is to be used mainly during the heat of the summer it may be well to consider planting the green with sprigs of an improved Bermudagrass which spreads rapidly and needs little or no fungicidal treatments, is not easily damaged and in general will produce a more foolproof putting green for the home lawn. All Bermudagrasses lose their green color in winter and, in the more northerly areas, some may winterkill entirely.

Regardless of the kind of grass used, a putting green should be mowed every day or every other day. Occasional aerifying and vertical mowing will help to keep the green in good condition. These services are becoming available on a custom basis from landscape gardeners and lawn service firms so that a homeowner need not be obliged to purchase, store and maintain this specialized equipment.

**Q—I have been told that I can use hydrated lime on my bent greens to help control brownpatch. Is this safe? How much should I use? (Va.)**

**A—**Hydrated lime is a respected and proven practice to aid in checking brownpatch during hot muggy weather. It acts

in at least two ways, to rapidly change the pH (reaction) of the surface and to dry the grass, both of which check the growth of fungus.

To add more water as a spray at a time when an excess of moisture already favors the organisms is not the best way to check brownpatch.

A treatment that helps to dry the grass will help check the spread of the disease. Two pounds of hydrated lime to 1,000 sq. ft. dusted on and allowed to remain is considered a safe application. Avoid using any soluble nitrogen fertilizer within a couple days of using hydrated lime because this active form of lime will release ammonia gas which can cause grass burns.

**Q—Can one save the plugs from the aerifying of greens and economically put them into the soil bed of a new green? (Ida.)**

**A—**Yes. This practice is growing in popularity and it makes it practical to have "every green a nursery". One enterprising superintendent we know planted a new nursery and all his new greens with the cores from aerifying his bent greens of a superior strain.

It is well to use the thatch spoons in



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**Q—We have been advised to use Dieldrin on our bent greens. Do you know of any reason that this material might be harmful? (Vt.)**

**A—**We know of no evidence that would make it necessary to issue any warning against the use of Dieldrin on bent greens. Sometimes, injury may occur when an oil carrier is used but then the damage would arise from the carrier and not the insecticide.

**Q—We have piles of sawdust all through the woods near our course and we can get it for the hauling. Will it be all right to use this as a source of organic matter in our greens? (N.C.)**

**A—**Sawdust is a good material for incorporating into your greens as a source of organic matter, for conditioning the heavy soil and to help hold a shot. Neither the kind of sawdust nor the age of the material seems to be very significant so

long as you use enough nitrogen to feed the organisms that attack and break down the sawdust.

Yellowing of the grass in connection with use of sawdust usually means lack of nitrogen, not acidity necessarily. Limestone added will help to decompose the sawdust. A rate of 25 lbs. of dolomitic limestone to 1000 sq. ft. usually will be adequate whenever sawdust is used.

**Q—We have some strains of Bermuda that throw seedheads, even under putting green conditions. They are unsightly and they interfere with putting. What can you suggest? (Ala.)**

**A—**The old method used to be to hand-rake and mow closely and then cover with topdressing. In this mechanized age we eliminate seedheads and the bumpy putting with vertical mowing equipment, used frequently to keep them under control.

Frequent, heavy feeding with nitrogen-carrying fertilizer helps to keep the grass growing vigorously in a vegetative state with fewer seedheads. It may be that you should check the phosphorus levels in the soil and, if phosphorus is high, reduce phosphorus feeding for a considerable

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period until tests show that phosphorus is needed again.

**Q**—We hear a lot of discussion about “thatch” and “mat” but there seems to be a lot of disagreement on definitions. What is your explanation? (N.H.)

**A**—Let's start with grain because that is where most of our trouble begins.

Grain is the surface development of grass stems and blades which interfere with and affect the true roll of the ball.

Thatch is the next deeper layer of living material (stems, leaves, runners, stolons) which, together with the surface grain, acts like a “thatched roof” to shed water.

Mat is the dead felt-like material between the thatch and the soil.

In my definition it all begins with the grain. If we keep this under control we will automatically control thatch (living tissues) and mat (dead tissues).

Grain and thatch can be removed mechanically a little at a time and there will always be live grass to furnish a putting surface. To drastically remove grain, thatch and mat all at one time would

utterly destroy the putting green, leaving no living material to grow and produce a new putting surface.

Mat must be brought down chemically and biologically with living organisms, aided by aerifying to remove columns of mat leaving holes through which air, moisture, nutrients and roots can move freely into the soil below.

A limited quantity of mat may be tolerated because it may provide a certain amount of cushion to help hold a shot. This would be true only if repeated frequent aerifying is practiced to overcome the bad effects of the mat and if vertical mowing is done to prevent grain and thatch from forming.

### WHAT PRO SHOULD KNOW

*(Continued from page 52)*

cated that in most cases the shop-boy would be wise to ship his refinishing problems to a suitable and experienced source.

Irons, as a rule, are able to withstand much more abuse than wood clubs. On iron clubs, the shop-boy does not encoun-

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