Grau's Answers to Turf Questions

Some Misconceptions Frequently Encountered

A misconception is an inaccurate understanding. Running through the hundreds of letters received by the Q & A dept., we run across numerous misconceptions. Some of these lead to rather sorry results.

One that is frequently encountered is: " . . . my soil is pH 7.8. Isn't that too high for bluegrass? What should I do to correct it?"

In some cases the questioner had applied sulfur to attempt to reduce the pH value and was asking what to do next. The fact is that seldom does soil pH become so high as to affect the growth of turfgrasses. Bluegrass grows well at pH 8.0 to 8.5 if it is supplied with a balanced nutrient diet. Bentgrass will grow well within a range of pH 4.5 to 8.5.

A high pH value may reduce the availability of certain nutrient elements such as iron, phosphorus and manganese. Then it becomes necessary to supply the critical elements rather than to attempt to lower the pH value of vast quantities of soil.

Another misconception occurs in relation to use of arsenicals for poa and crabgrass control. The questioner uses arsenicals and wonders why results are not forthcoming. A study of management practices reveals that the fertilizer program quite effectively nullifies the effects of the arsenic. It has been shown that low phosphorus increases effectiveness of arsenical treatments. Yet the turf in question receives regular treatments of phosphorus-bearing materials which build up the P level in the soil, practically insuring failure with arsenicals.

The error is particularly tragic in the case of new golf courses. Supts. at these places want desperately to keep poa from taking over, but at the same time unintentionally do some of the things that help insure a good crop of poa.

A third misconception has to do with the texture of topdressing. Hard greens, ball bounces, compaction, and poor water penetration are among the complaints. One look at the topdressing bin and the answer is clear. "Why do you use such fine-textured, silty topdressing?" The answer is, "Because it is so easy to apply and work into the grass." Granted that very fine (blow sand) topdressing is nice to handle, the trouble starts after a layer of this material is on the green. Water won't penetrate it, roots can't move through it and air is effectively prevented from moving into soil below. The finer the soil particles, the more effectively will it be compacted. Thus, the temporary advantage of "easy-to-handle" material effectively nullifies all other management practices designed to provide the best playing conditions at the lowest cost.

Topdressing mixtures must be of the same texture as, or slightly coarser than, the mixture in the green.

Mattei Heads Northeastern GCSA

Lawrence Mattei, Kingsboro GC, Gloversville, N. Y., has been re-elected pres. of the Northeastern GCSA for 1961. James K. Thomson is vp, Paul O'Leary is sec. and John Espey, treas.

U of M Graduates

Joseph Troll of University of Massachusetts reports that 21 supt. trainees will be graduated from the turf school's two-year course in June. Training includes at least six months of practical maintenance work, on which students are graded, plus regular classroom work.