

Grau's Answers to Turf Questions



Can We Afford It?

Many courses are being built. Many more are needed. Some courses are in excellent condition, turfwise; others are in a sad state. To the trained eye it is readily apparent that nitrogen starvation is one of the reasons for thin, weedy turf on most courses. Fertilizer test plots confirm these observations.

When an approach is made to club officials and the supt. regarding an adequate feeding program, the response occasionally is likely to be, "Oh, we can't afford that!" The suggested program never is in excess of needs — quite often, for the sake of economy, it may be below the quantity known to be desirable.

It seems that when a club can afford to hire an architect and a builder to provide a course, surely there should be funds provided to properly maintain it. Without playable turf, a golf course is without excuse for existence.

Unfortunately, there are a few club officials who feel that the place to save money is in the purchase of fertilizer.

This is false economy. Recently a green chmn. told how he had saved his club a great deal of money by buying a low-cost material. It was applied at a rate to supply less than 40 lbs. of N to the acre for a season. The fairways were sadly in need of renovation. The chief cause was N starvation. Much member dissatisfaction was expressed.

Sample Requirements

The nitrogen requirements of an 18-hole course at a midwestern club, are about as follows:

	Total lbs. actual N for the year
Tees—6 lbs N per 1,000 sq. ft. per year	600
Fairways—4 lbs. N per 1,000 sq. ft. per year (estimate 40 A. of fairway turf)	7,000
Greens—8 lbs N per 1,000 sq. ft. per year	880

(Note: It is understood that Ca, P, and K and all growth elements must be in balance)

These figures are modest and do not represent the maximum that could be applied. Some greens get 10 to 12 lbs. N a year — 8 is about average. Bermuda fairways and greens can utilize much more N than bluegrass and bent. To use less than the required amount of N is to deny the grass its capability of providing a dense cushion of playable turf for which members pay their dues. Adequate feeding brings about these benefits:

Denser turf to make play more pleasurable;

More efficient use of water. Hungry plants require up to five times more water than those properly nourished;

Steadier growth;

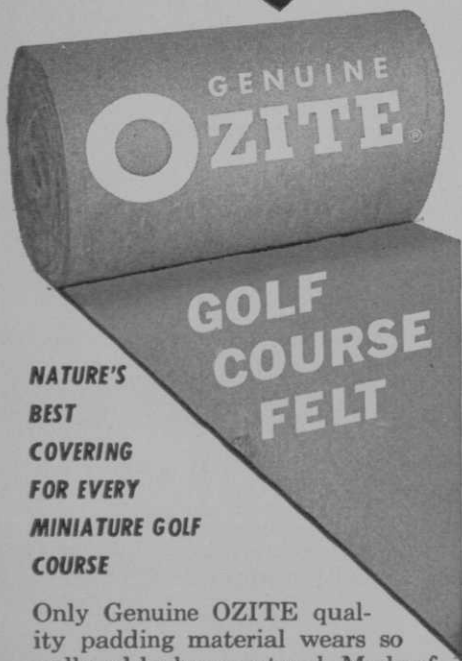
Healthier grass with fewer disease problems and more benefit from fungicides.

Cost Is Reasonable

Cost of an adequate N feeding program is reasonable enough. At clubs where inorganic materials are used it may be as low as \$1,200. Where there is optimum feeding of natural organics it probably runs around \$3,500. In either case, depending somewhat on the standard of course maintenance, the figures mentioned probably don't exceed 5 or 6 and certainly not more than 7 or 8 per cent of the entire maintenance budget. Even if labor costs in handling fertilizer, storage and application are taken into ac-



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count, the total cost for sufficient nitrogen to grow grass properly probably amounts to more than 10 or 12 per cent of the annual budget.

Club Needs Superintendent

Q. We have a major problem and that is lack of proper maintenance and upkeep of our greens. Our course is located in the Black Hills and we are unable to employ a permanent supt. Our playing season is relatively short, running from May 15 through Sept. 15. We do not have extremely hot and humid weather. We do have long winters with a large amount of snow, generally averaging around 12 ft. As a result there's considerable snow mold. We brush the greens as soon as the snow is off.

We do not have an aerating machine. So our greens have been aerified only once in many years. They have been topdressed twice in the past four years with 70% sand, not too fine, 30% dirt and other fertilizers, generally sludge. Other than being topdressed twice in a long time, we generally fertilize early each year after the snow is off. That is about the extent of upkeep. We have some chickweed, poa annua and other foreign matter. Test of plugs from our greens by state laboratories revealed that the pH is too high.

Our course was built in 1935. Our greens are bent and I understand very good materials were used in construction. The drainage is away from the green and is very good.

I would appreciate it if you would outline a definite program to aid in rebuilding our greens. Also explain the value of aerifying and topdressing and why so much sand is used. This will aid in explaining to our directors and members what is needed and the value of upkeep.

(South Dakota)

A.: A short playing season does not seem to be a valid reason for not having a full-time supt. A year-round man could assist with many things other than grass during the winter. With a good supt., many of your present problems would be cared for routinely.

It is quite possible that your greens are in need of a thorough thatching. Aero-thatching removes unwanted, excess material, and, at the same time, the one machine cultivates and aerates the soil. The playing surfaces are left intact. Water and fertilizers easily enter the rootzone. A good time to do the job is in spring when growth has started. Healing is much faster under these conditions.

In your case, and wherever minimum maintenance is desired or necessary, a twice-a-year feeding program is in your favor. For this you could make a spring application of a solid ureaform at 15 lbs. to 1,000 sq. ft. preferably just after aero-thatching. In late summer you would make an application of 0-20-20 at 5 lbs. to 1,000 sq. ft. plus 10 lbs. of solid ureaform. This is your entire feeding program.

Chickweed, poa annua and other foreign matter may be planted with unclean topdress-

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