

GRAU'S ANSWERS TO TURF QUESTIONS

BY FRED V. GRAU



This portion of the annual roundup will not be all-inclusive because the writer was not able to cover every part of the U. S. and Canada. Missing will be specific references to the Pacific Northwest, the Southeast and the North Central States. It is believed, however, that many of the topics will apply across the board. The roundup is being presented in two sections, the second of which will appear in January Golfdom.

Qualified Field Reps

Top-ranking golf course supts. have expressed themselves forcibly on the subject of qualifications of field men who make periodic visits for purposes of sales or recommendations. The common complaint is that there is a regrettable lack of background training and up-to-date information on widely-used products and techniques.

The days are not gone when ill-trained inexperienced salesmen continue to attempt to sell products that most supts. neither need nor want. The experienced supt. has nothing to fear because, with his superior knowledge and training, he can quickly determine the salesman's worth and whether or not he can improve the supt's lot with his product. Tragedy arises when a supt., neither too well trained nor experienced, becomes the victim of a "product peddler". Too often the salesman can not name the active ingredients in his product. Too often he isn't fully aware of the effect of the product on various turfgrasses.

The letter "S" stands not only for sales but also for service. The question is not only, "Will the product do a better job?" or "Is it more economical?" or "Will it last longer?" or "Will it save on labor?" but, more important, "Will the distributor and the manufacturer stand behind it?"

Progressive supts. welcome visits from those who can offer information and experiences which help them. Products are

essential in maintaining turf. It is paramount for the representative to truthfully, fully and accurately describe his product so that there is a clear understanding of how it works and how it can be of benefit. Then, and then only, can the supt. make an intelligent decision as to how it fits into his program. Many supts. have implied that what they need is fewer but better trained salesmen.

A Course Architect's Question

A prominent golf course architect asks: "Why is it so difficult for a new supt. to recognize the different in practices between new seedling turf and mature established turf?" At once, we inquire, "What do you mean?"

First is the item of fertilization. The only time we get our materials mixed deeply into the soil is during construction. After turf is established, we are limited to surface applications. Why not get the maximum quantity of nutrients incorporated when the soil is being stirred? In this way we have a chance to develop deep roots.

Next, the architect cites watering practices. The worst sin with young seedling turf is flooding or overwatering. New grass needs only to be kept gently moist. Old turf can stand deep soaking but young grass doesn't need this kind of irrigation.

In the fall when ights are cool he finds
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young seedling turf being chilled with heavy night watering. Moderate watering during the warm days will help grass to grow, especially if turf can "go to bed" at night warm and reasonably dry. Turf probably will mature faster this way.

Another point of difference is the way in which young turf is mowed! Some let it grow tall before mowing to "get deeper roots". A better way seems to be to start mowing as soon as there is anything to mow — and keep it mowed! Regular mowing helps turf to mature faster. Too much tall growth defeats the purpose.

Topdressing new turf takes a skilful hand compared to treating old mature grass. Heavy topdressings on a newly planted green can do considerable damage. We assure supts. that this is not a sweeping criticism of their profession. It is an honest plea for a clearer understanding of the architect's viewpoint when he is responsible for a finished, playable course.

Enough Qualified Men?

Hundreds of new golf courses are being built and opened for play. Architects constantly are on the prowl for competent supts. to supervise construction and to remain as supts. Many are called but few are chosen. The expressions of dissatisfaction increase. It seems that the few turf schools in the country can not possibly train enough young men eventually to fill the positions that are opening. It has been said many times that a man freshly graduated from a turf school is not a qualified supt. unless he had experience before taking over a course. Most graduates need a few years of on-the-job training.

When a good supt. moves to a new course where the salary is higher and benefits greater, it still is common practice to advance the tractor driver or the mechanic to his position, whether or not he is qualified to assume the responsibilities of a supt. To this day we do not have enough men who are comfortably able to take guests to the clubhouse for lunch, to meet with the green committee, successfully defend their proposals and to command the respect of pro, manager, and club officials. Being a supt. carries the responsibility of far more than growing grass. He must train himself so well on every subject that he will have no hesitation in "selling" a good program to the green chairman.

Let each man in this field ask himself:

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Grau's Roundup

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"Do I have a promising young man who deserves to be trained for the profession?" We need not only to train our own replacements, but to provide for the hundreds of new openings.

Change of Green Chairman

The practice of changing the green chairman each year is one that effectively blocks the development of a program of maintenance that has continuity. It is distressing to talk to supts. who are unable to decide on maintenance matters of vital importance because a new chairman is about to be installed. The retiring chairman refuses to okay a program for fear he might interfere with the incoming chairman. The fear expressed most often is that the new man will institute unwarranted changes based on whims and personal desires.

John Henry at Brook Hollow in Dallas is happy with his setup of a permanent committee with rotating chairmen. He

never needs to worry about the new chairman changing his program because the entire committee (for men, usually) has approved the continuing program.

It is not considered good management to change the staff of a going business each year. We wonder why it is done on golf courses.

Zoysia on the Move

Heavy losses of U-3 bermuda in fairways have caused many supts to look to zoysia, especially where soils are tight or shade is heavy. There are more zoysia tees than ever before and more nurseries are being established for plugging, sprigging and sodding around traps, in fairways and on tees. Meyer is the strain most widely used because it is available and the texture is wholly acceptable.

Zoysia managment often leaves much to be desired. When it is cut too high and thatch is allowed to develop, it is unacceptable to golfers. Best zoysia treatment includes close mowing ($\frac{1}{2}$ inch to $\frac{3}{4}$ inch), minimum irrigation (only when needed), removal of clippings, occasional

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thatching, and once-a-year fertilization. New strains of zoysia still need to be evaluated under play (Midwest). Some "unknowns" are looking very good at Penn State.

When Grass Wouldn't Grow

The spring of '63 was cold and rugged. Complaints from far and near were heard that, "the grass won't grow". This has been heard before and it is a serious thing.

All research data are not at hand concerning one set of experiments at Black Mountain, N. C., but we hope that Dr. W. R. Gilbert of N. C. State College, Raleigh, may have them available soon. The tests involved several bentgrasses which were treated with three fertilizer materials that are widely used. The same conditions which caused grass "not to grow" prevailed at Ross Taylor's course in spring '63 where Dr. Gilbert located the experiments.

All during the heavy winter it was apparent that one of the three materials maintained better color, life and vigor in

all of the bents. When spring came, this one material caused the bents to grow well in spite of the cold. The dormant condition of the grass persisted for several weeks with two of the fertilizer materials but, with warm weather in May and June, they, too, finally started to induced growth.

Since the report has not been published all we can do here is to indicate that there are some factors of slow spring growth that have not been answered satisfactorily. The conclusiveness of the Black Mountain tests is indicated by the fact that all four replications essentially were identical.

Not on New Greens

Inspection of new greens reveals an occasional "stinker". Literally, these are the ones that have been built with manure (steer) as part of the organic matter. So far, the only conclusion is that manure does a far better job growing corn. The rapid breakdown of this material tends to release nutrients at such speed and in such quantity that the grass grows too rapidly and is virtually destroyed by disease.

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