

# Organic Material Helps to Rebuild Depleted Soil

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**S**ome of us who, for many years, have been responsible for golf course maintenance have wondered how we once managed to keep greens in such excellent condition despite the somewhat primitive stage of turf management technology compared with today's advanced methods, materials and machinery.

We had turf diseases, pests and miscellaneous troubles, including poor construction, to contend with in our early days of "greenkeeping". But, in retrospect, they do not seem to have been any worse comparatively than the difficulties that beset us even with all the advantages we have in this modern, highly scientific turf management era.

Evaluations of factors accounting for progress and continuing problems in turf maintenance depend to some extent on the viewpoint and interests of the person who is making the appraisal. I had my own special interest in going with Dr. Paul Allen after spending 40 years in the management of golf courses in eastern, central and southern states. After Dr. Allen combined activated sewage sludge and poultry manure into a "True Organic Compost" that was being talked about favorably in Florida, I tried it on greens at the PGA National course in Dunedin, and later on some of the greens at the PGA courses in Palm Beach Gardens.

Results were decidedly satisfactory. The weedless compost, rich in major nutrients and minor elements, non-burning and odorless, wasn't absolutely unique. There are numerous effective turf fertilizers. But it appears that the old-fashion-

ed value of soil building in "True Organic" compost and similar material has supplied what had done so well by us in the old days.

A good living organic compost is much more than just a fertilizer when made of 100 per cent manures. It is a means of continuing life. Nature makes compost. Manures composted scientifically are evidence of nature's efforts to build soil. This type of organic compost is an efficient digested fertilizer and the heart of soil building.

## **Bacteria Depleted**

Many experienced supts. realize that life (soil bacteria) is being depleted in the soil. This is caused by the constant use of sterile materials and the necessary application of various chemicals needed to correct weed and turf diseases. Detergents and chlorine in city water used on many courses also deplete soil life. Seldom are materials, containing living soil organisms, added to turf programs to help remedy the deficiency. Lack of active, living organics in the soil creates a condition difficult to cope with. Unhealthy turf, shorter roots and compaction result. The soil becomes less friable, preventing adequate water and air circulation.

To correct this condition supts. are beginning to revert to the old custom of using substantial amounts of live and active organics. Humus is a necessary and active organic portion of the soil. It creates a loamy textured structure by producing granulation, thereby improving aeration and drainage. It also improves the soil's exchange capacity, which is the soil's ability to retain plant nutrients and moisture. Active organic matter is needed by soil microorganisms as a source of food.

Accumulating an ample supply of active organisms in the soil reduces injury to growing plants from toxic substances and excessive quantities of soluble salts. Sufficient living organic matter in the root zone assures the full and complete productive value of all types of inorganic or sterile fertilizers.

Regular applications of properly composted organic matter, scientifically digested and not sterilized, will, in time, develop a rich and fertile soil.