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by Fred V. Grau

ANSWERS TO TURF QUESTIONS

A hard look at financial realities

Golf courses are being squeezed from several fronts. Taxes are up. Income tends to be down. Costs of equipment and services are up. Spending among unemployed executives, who are normally high salaried, is down. Many articles have been published that document details behind these over-simplified statements.

The hard facts are that the total situation means "belt-tightening" on the part of the golf course superintendent. He will be expected to maintain high-quality turf as usual, but his budget may not be approved to cover the higher costs of operation. Not all clubs will be affected equally. For those that are feeling the squeeze, there may be some guidelines that will help them weather the storm.

Reduce water use. It must be conserved and re-cycled. Less frequent irrigation will result in less frequent mowing.

Introduce drought-tolerant grasses. It is one thing to introduce these grasses, it is another to manage them properly. Overwatering has reduced turf quality in countless cases. Golfers like to hit controlled golf shots. I recall vividly hitting golf shots years ago with Al Watrous and the late Horton Smith in the Detroit area. Both men preferred unwatered fescue turf for playing a controlled shot. They did not care whether the grass was brown, yellow, black or green—

they wanted primarily close-cut firm turf.

Our principal fairway grasses are, in the main, drought tolerant. Bluegrass and bermuda can survive for weeks without supplemental irrigation particularly if the grass is well nourished.

Return to nature. I cannot believe that every weed from fence to fence has to be killed to provide enjoyable golf. Many lovely wildflowers have been destroyed by all-out weed control programs. Many sloping areas out of the line of play can be seeded to ground covers that require no maintenance. One superintendent asked, "Will golfers accept this?" My answer was to the effect that they will have little choice and that they might be pleasantly surprised.

This brief discourse is only a beginning. I've made no pretense at completeness. Much more will be written on these subjects in the months to come. Hopefully my readers will contribute their ideas so that we can plan future guidelines.

Less artificiality, more naturalness

Q—At Penn State I recall hearing you talk about turf in South Africa and that almost without exception the turf is composed of some type of bermudagrass (*Cynodon*). You said that the turf is dormant and brown during the winter months and that little, if any, over-seeding with cool-season grasses is done. Don't golfers object to the brown color of the turf? Do they play the year around?

(North Carolina)

A—There is little or no over-seeding done. There is golf activity 12 months of the year. The players are used to the fast brown turf and they voice no objections that I could determine. There does not seem to be the demand for such a high degree of perfection as there is in the United States, yet everyone seems to enjoy his game. There is less artificiality and more naturalness.

Q—I would like to increase the supply of magnesium in my putting green soils. What method would you suggest? I have nine holes that are two years old which test "good." The greens on the old nine that are 10 years old test "medium." The pH is perfect.

(New Jersey)

A—The best and most economical source of magnesium is dolomitic limestone that has a high magnesium

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