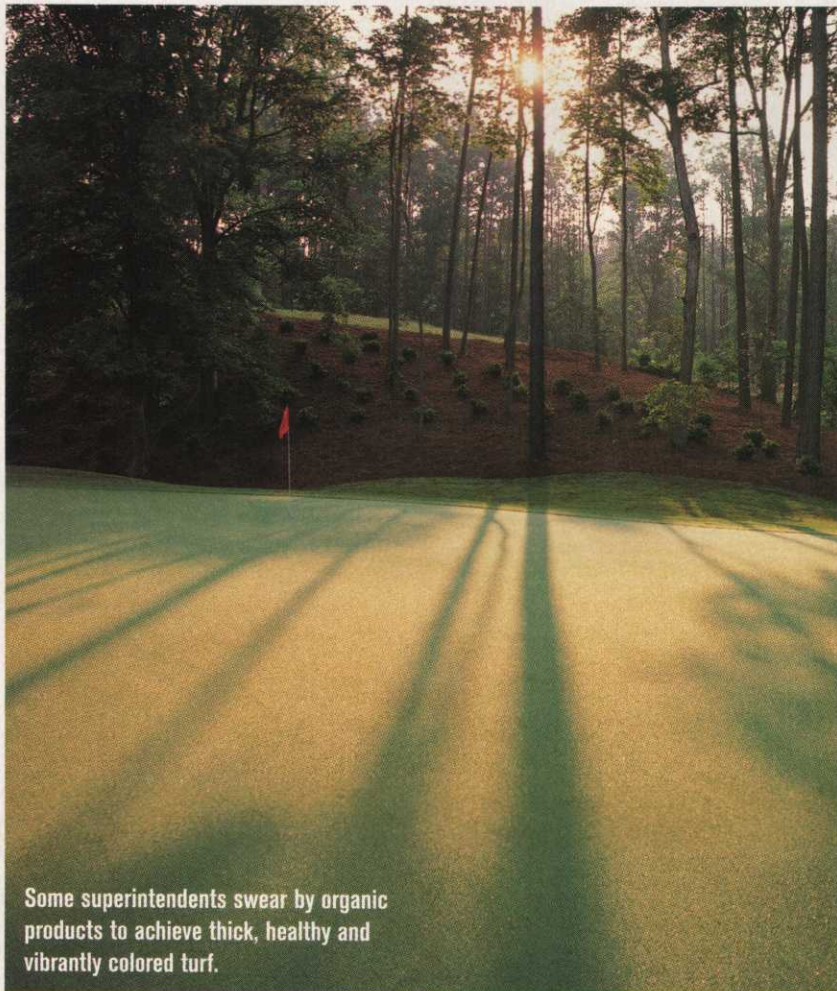


In Organics They Trust

These superintendents tried
biological fertilizers to treat turf
— and were impressed

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MIKE KLEMMIE

Some superintendents swear by organic products to achieve thick, healthy and vibrantly colored turf.

Most superintendents agree it's difficult to use your golf course as a guinea pig to experiment with biological products. There just isn't much margin for error.

But it seems more superintendents are keeping their minds open to using organic products, and they're gaining faith in them. *Golfdom* spoke with four superintendents who are convinced of the benefits of organic fertilizers. They relate their stories below:

Let there be green

The back-nine greens were bland, and superintendent Tom Kastler was feeling blue.

Kastler, superintendent of Club at Runaway Bay in Runaway Bay, Texas, noticed his new bentgrass greens were growing in fine, but lacked a vibrant color.

It was March 1997, and the greens had been rebuilt the previous September to USGA specifications. Kastler knew he was using a quality bentgrass, but he also knew the variety wasn't known for its resplendent color. It was his goal to get the greens in colorful shape for the course's spring reopening. "I'm not opposed to trying new products," Kastler says.

So Kastler tried Flexx Golf & Sports Turf Pre-mix from Pittsburgh-based Plant Health Care. Kastler had heard that Flexx

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stimulated fast green-up and root growth in turfgrass. Flexx is a chelated micronutrient biostimulant with beneficial bacteria and yucca, a natural wetting agent. In addition to being used for grow-ins, renovation and maintenance of warm- and cool-season grasses, it's also used to help turf recover from traffic, and insect and disease damage.

Kastler says it helped brighten Run-away Bay's greens.

"We tank mixed Flexx and tried it," Kastler says. "(The color) of the greens took off. It was like we had a green neon bulb that wasn't plugged in. When we used Flexx, it was like we put the plug in the socket."

Kastler says he has an open mind when it comes to using organic products. He remembers hearing stories — and believing them — about how superintendents of yesteryear sprayed molasses on greens to successfully spur microbial activity.

Kastler used Flexx when the semi-private course rebuilt its front-nine greens shortly after the back nine. He now uses Flexx every two weeks.

Robust roots

David D'Andrea says the greens were in bad shape when he took over superintendent duties at Riverside Municipal GC in Portland, Maine, about two years ago.

The greens were compacted and had little root mass. "I took a soil sample, and the soil didn't even smell good," D'Andrea says.

D'Andrea knew he would have to stimulate the positive microbial activity in the greens to save them. He admits he was a doubting Thomas when it came to using organic products, but he opted to give Nature Safe's Natural & Organic Fertilizers a test.

"Before I could get the greens looking good on the surface, I had to get

them looking good below the surface," he says.

In the spring of 1998, D'Andrea began an intense program of aerating, overseeding and fertilizing with Nature Safe's products. By mid-summer, the bentgrass greens had a 3-inch root zone across the course, he says.

D'Andrea used Nature Safe's 8-3-5 Stress Guard Fertilizer, 10-2-8 All-Season Fertilizer and 7-1-14 High Potassium Fertilizer. The 8-3-5 is enhanced with blood and meat meals to increase the number of soil microbes; the 10-2-8 is good for areas with nitrogen and potassium deficiencies; and the 7-1-14 is enhanced with bone meal for improved root development and fortified with added amounts of humic acid.

"It also helped with disease control," D'Andrea says. "I have little or none of it."

D'Andrea used the organics in conjunction with foliar feeding. The synergy created thick and healthy greens. D'Andrea says he's impressed with the greens' heat tolerance, which he attributes to the root mass.

Thick and thin

Seven of the 36 holes at Dataw Island Club in St. Helena Island, S.C., were covered by shade, and Sam Green knew he had a problem.

Green had just taken the job as director of golf operations at Dataw Island last May after spending time as an assistant superintendent at Congressional CC in Bethesda, Md. It was transition time, and Green noticed that the overseeded bermudagrass wasn't advancing as aggressively as he hoped after aerification.

"A few of the greens were weak from inadequate sunlight," Green says, adding that lack of air movement didn't help.

While at Congressional, Green had used Nutramax Laboratories' amino acid biofertilizers to treat thinning grass. Al-

though the Edgewood, Md.-based company's products had been used primarily on bentgrass, Green wanted to try it on bermudagrass.

Green applied Nutramax's Macro-Sorb foliar, Macro-Sorb radicular and Quelant-Ca.

The foliar increases chlorophyll content and photosynthetic capacity of turfgrass during stress periods. The radicular allows for greater absorption and transport of nutrients through the roots into the plant. Quelant-Ca is an L-amino acids chelated calcium product to correct calcium deficiency in turfgrass.

Green used the products in combination every two weeks. In a month, the bermudagrass was growing thicker.

"I saw big results," he says.

In the winter, Green says he was more cautious with the biofertilizers during overseeding because he didn't want the bermudagrass to smother the *Poa trivialis*. It was all part of the learning process of using the products on bermudagrass.

Green says he plans to use the biofertilizers on fairways this summer.

On the double

The September sodding of the 18th fairway at the Bedford Golf & Tennis Club was postponed because of inclement weather. That meant superintendent Bob Nielsen would have to sod in the spring, shortly before the Bedford, N.Y., course opened. That meant he would be hurried.

"I needed something to get the turf moving quickly," Nielsen says.

He found that something with GroWin, a granular rootzone biostimulant that accelerates the growth of sodded, seeded and sprigged turf.

Nielsen incorporated the product, manufactured by Ann Arbor, Mich.-based Emerald Isle, into the top 4 inches of mix on the fairway prior to sodding. In four weeks, the fairway grass was thick and healthy.

"I was pleasantly surprised," Nielsen says. ■