

Foliar Fertilizer in the Fold

Superintendent finds that amino acid-based product is just what his course's faltering greens needed

BY LARRY AYLWARD, EDITOR

Charlie Fultz is a turf medicine man who says he has a reputation for "bring-

ing back greens from the dead." For that reason, Fultz says he was hired as superintendent of the Country Club of Culpeper in Culpeper, Va., in 1996. While the greens weren't dead at the golf course, they weren't thriving. "They were in bad shape," Fultz says.

The problem

Nine of the 18 greens at the Country Club of Culpeper are push-up greens and 50 years old. The other nine are sand-based greens and

Problem

The greens at the Country Club of Culpeper were barely holding half-inch roots through thatch during the summer months.

Solution

An amino acid-based product that's 18 percent nitrogen and designed to be completely absorbed foliarly.



7 years old. But the greens had at least one thing in common about three years ago: In the mid-to-late summer, their turf thinned and root depth diminished, thanks to heat and mowing stress.

Fultz couldn't place his greens on an Augusta-like fertilizer program because his modest budget couldn't afford it. Still, he says he was using biostimulants and soluble fertilizers that were highly regarded and expensive. "But I was paying too much and not getting everything from the products that I should have," Fultz contends.

Fultz says it was difficult for his greens to maintain healthy root structures during the torrid summers in the transition zone.

"In this area, roots are going to shrink during the summer," Fultz acknowledges. "But my greens were barely holding half-inch roots through thatch."

The bottom line is maintaining healthy greens, the most important component of the course, Charlie Fultz says.

The solution

In early summer 1999, Fultz received a flyer from Grigg Brothers, which described the Albion, Idaho-based company's line of foliar fertilizers.

"I read it, and it piqued my interest," Fultz says. "I was impressed with the research the company conducted to back its products."

Much of the research was done by plant nutrition expert Gene W. Miller, a professor at Utah State University and Grigg Brothers' director of product development. To develop efficient foliar fertilizers, Miller has studied natural nutrient chelation, uptake, absorption and translocation processes in plants for many years.

Fultz was also impressed

that Gary Grigg, a co-founder of the company with his brother, Mark, was a long-time superintendent. "The company's products are developed by a superintendent with the superintendent in mind," Fultz says.

Fultz decided to give Grigg Brothers' products a three-month trial. He used the company's Gary's Green product on his greens and was impressed. The amino acid-based product is 18 percent nitrogen and designed to be completely absorbed foliarly. Complexing and chelating agents prevent it from burning turf. "The course's greens were better the second half of 1999 than they had been since I'd come here," Fultz says.

Fultz was pleased with the product's impact on the greens' root mass. He also liked that Gary's Green provided a strong greenup without rapid growth.

The product also helped prolong poa annua on the

course's older greens, which also feature Penncross bentgrass. "The poa that usually stresses out in the summer wasn't stressing out," Fultz says.

Last year, Fultz applied the product to his greens in May.

"By the end of the year, the greens were in phenomenal shape," Fultz says. "The club's veteran members were saying we've never seen the greens look and putt this well."

The greens' root depth shrunk a bit, but not like before.

"The greens didn't lose as much root depth as they did the year before and the year before that," Fultz says. "They

sustained root growth."

The roots on the older greens were 1.5 inches to 2 inches deep. They were 4 inches deep on the newer greens.

This year, Fultz used the products in April soon after aerifying the greens.

"I'm amazed at the root depth I'm seeing in my old greens," he said in June. "It's around 5 inches."

Outlook

Interestingly, Fultz says the bentgrass is overtaking the poa on the older greens. This has only been happening since he's used Gary's Green, which isn't billed to perform such a function.

"While the poa isn't stressing out, it's also not spreading," Fultz says. He notes the greens at Culpeper were 60-40 poa before he started using the product, and now they're 50-50

Fultz uses Gary's Green with Sili-Kal B and Tuff Turf, two other Grigg Brothers' products, every two weeks. He supplements the greens as needed with the company's Carbo-Plex, a stress reliever, and UltraPlex, a biostimulant complex.

The products aren't inexpensive, Fultz says, but they're worth it — even with the course's low budget.

Fultz's annual fertilizer

budget is a little more than \$18,000. He spends about \$950 monthly on Grigg Brothers' products from April through October, less than 35 percent of his budget.

The bottom line is maintaining healthy greens, by far the most important component of the course, Fultz says. On a recent day, Fultz stared at his newly cut greens with pride. They were at one-eighth inch and stimping at about 10.

"It wasn't possible [to mow them that short] three years ago," he says. "But they look as good as ever, and the roots aren't hindered because we lowered the cutting height." ■

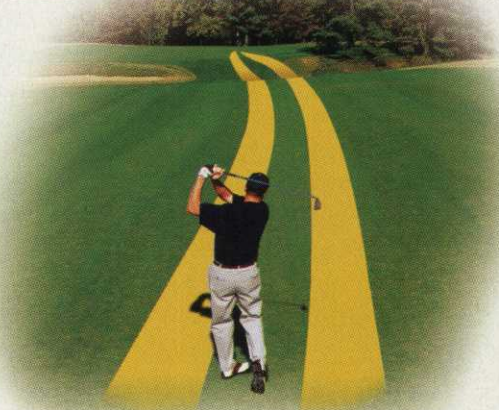
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