Tips

Selecting Amendments

Trial on your own course is the best method to rate soil enhancers, expert says

Many products are considered "amendments" to the turf system, including inorganic, organic, microbial, nutritional and hormonal materials. Historically, some have lived up to advertised claims and some haven't. Despite the fact that many have now been proven effective, the plethora of products on the market still creates confusion.

"The superintendent is drowning in a sea of amendment technologies that all claim to be the magic bullet," says Bill Torello, a University of Massachusetts professor of turfgrass management. Torello recommends superintendents ask themselves several questions before buying new amendments, such as:

Have there been unbiased field tests on the material and, if so, how much?

"It is only common sense that the buyer make sure the material in question has been field tested by a strictly unbiased source, such as universities or well-known private laboratories/companies," Torello recommends. "If there's limited information with only private testimonials from individual users, then it's a buyer-beware situation. Ask for copies of the research reports, which support the claims of the sellers."

Torello says many amendments are expensive and should be tried on a trial basis on your own course if questions remain.

"Trial on your own course is the best test, but there must be several replications of the product and control areas where the material is not used for comparison," he adds.

That's the strategy that superintendent Kevin Downing has implemented at Willoughby GC in Stuart, Fla.

"The benefits of enhancement are not always readily visible," he says. "I'm conservative in nature, so I take my selective shots. If something looks viable, I'll try it for awhile. I'll split greens or do percentages to see if it does have an effect."

Do I really need this product to manage my turf?

Of course, different products mean different answers. If the product is humate or humic acids, for example, then research shows that these amendments respond best in soils/growth mediums low in organic matter, Torello says. That would include grow-in, sand-based greens that do not have the organic matter and cation exchange capacity to supply mineral nutrients, particularly micronutrients.

Mike Vella, superintendent at Sugarloaf GC in Carrabassett Valley, and Downing agree about maximizing the value of humic acids and calcium products.

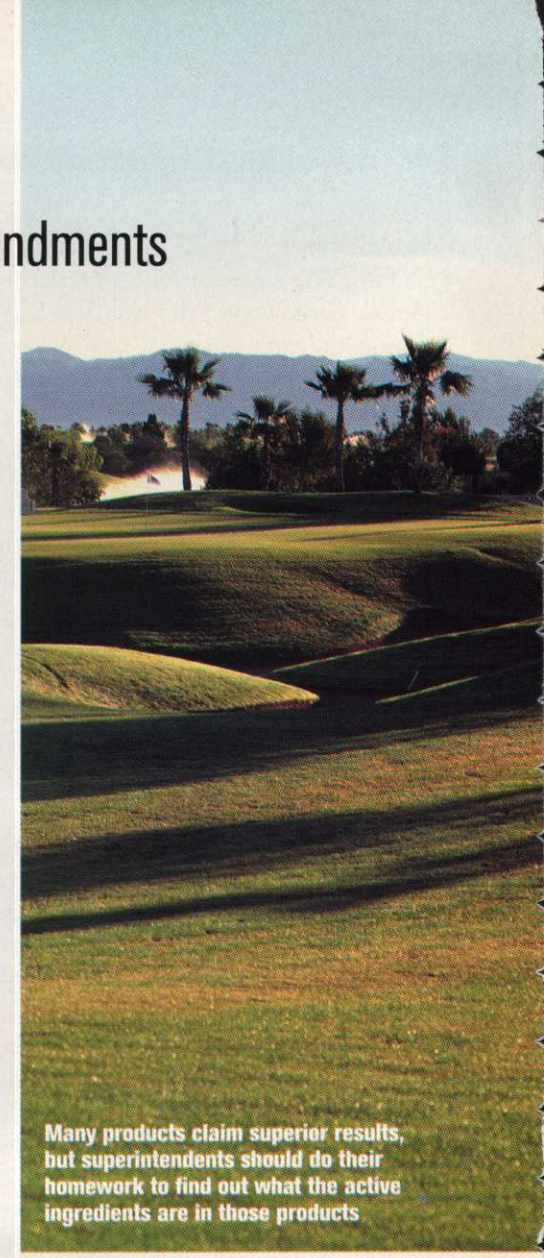
"Spraying calcium and humic acid has become a big thing," Vella says. "It works, particularly in grow-in situations because you don't have any nutrients in straight sand until you get some organic matter built up."

Adds Downing: "We've used calcium silicate products during tournaments. It seems to help the turf stand up better and gives you better ball roll."

If there's a response, is it because of the added material or to the stated "active ingredient," which makes each product unique?

"Examples would be the colorants or iron additions to a liquid fungicide application, where the active ingredient is the fungicide, but the additives will green-up the turf as a side effect," Torello explains.

Many products claim superior growth, color and/or density of turf when they are applied. Superintendents should do their homework to discover the active ingredients and additives.



Many products claim superior results, but superintendents should do their homework to find out what the active ingredients are in those products.

MIKE KLEMME

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