



One superintendent says foliar feeding is the optimum way to achieve the best plant health, appearance and playability – as evident by the turfgrass in this photo.

Balancing Act

Superintendents maintain equilibrium for foliar feeding frequency

BY DAVID FRABOTTA, SENIOR EDITOR

Heightened demand for consistent and pristine putting surfaces have fueled a frenzy in foliar feeding during the past decade. Superintendents have relied on leaf-uptake formulations to keep turfgrass growth steady and predictable.

Ideally, the best way to keep turfgrass growing at a consistent rate is to feed it just enough for each day. Of course, daily fertility treatments are impractical considering labor demands, but many superintendents strive to keep fertility regimens at very close intervals so they can maintain regulated growth without unpredictable flushes.

“Foliar feeding is the optimum way to achieve the best plant health, appearance and playability,” says Ron Swing, the certified superintendent of ArrowCreek Golf

Club in Reno, Nev., which features 36 holes, including the Arnold Palmer-designed Legend Course that plays on bluegrass.

Many superintendents agree that controlling growth flushes allows plants to stay healthy, but the real benefit to controlling growth is the ability to provide optimal playing conditions.

“I don’t think it’s as beneficial for the grass plants as it is for the players,” says Doug Petersan, superintendent of the Austin Golf Club, a Ben Crenshaw/Bill Coore design that plays on zoysiagrass. “It keeps greens as consistent as possible on a daily basis.”

Back at ArrowCreek, Swing says his crew applies nitrogen and other specific micronutrients every 14 days on his bentgrass greens. “Weekly would be better, but logistics and budgetary constraints here don’t allow for more frequent applications,” he says.

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Ideally, he says he would be able to do tees and approaches with regular foliar feedings as well. With a higher budget, he would also supplement granular applications on the fairways with monthly micro-nutrient foliar applications.

Petersan also fertilizes on a 14-day schedule, and he puts down about 2 pounds of

nitrogen per 1,000 square feet on his Crenshaw bentgrass greens.

Some clubs strive to fertilize even more often, especially ones that have a high profile among golfers and within the industry.

"With the liquid fertilization, we are typically applying no greater than seven-day frequencies, and it is not unusual to feed every five days depending on plant needs at specific times of year," says Brad G. Kocher, a certified superintendent and senior vice president of grounds and golf course management at Pinehurst (N.C.) Resort.

Kocher says Pinehurst's foliar is typically left on the leaf blade, and liquid is typically



The real benefit to controlling growth flushes is providing optimal playing conditions.

washed in with a little overhead irrigation. All the nutritional applications to greens at Pinehurst are from liquid sources unless new greens are being grown in.

Pinehurst grows bentgrass on its greens, and the rest of the course is Tifway bermudagrass. "It is important to know which nutrient sources are capable of foliar absorption and which are better taken up by roots if you are applying foliar and not watering in," Kocher notes.

Nolan Wenker, superintendent of Langdon Farms Golf Club in Aurora, Ore., conducts soil tests to determine which nutrients might be missing from his turfgrass, but he says his foliar feeding program on greens has provided a good base, and he seldom needs to supplement inputs. He applies .2 pounds of 24-8-16 fertilizer every two weeks from March through October, targeting 5 pounds to 6 pounds a year.

"Two weeks is a pretty happy medium," Wenker says. "A lot of guys do one-tenth of a pound a week, but I really don't think there are drastic positive effects (with one-week frequencies). Two-tenths every other week seems to do pretty good." ■

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