Pesticide research could include comparing different products or one product with varying rates.

PHOTO COURTESY: BASF

Do-It-Yourself Research

Simple, effective tips to improve your golf course

BY KYLE MILLER

Every product used to manage a golf course is tested extensively before it ever gets to the maintenance building. But experienced golf course superintendents know that products researched in other locations with different conditions may perform slightly differently on their courses. To more completely understand a product's performance on your course, do as the university experts do. Research it.

Do-it-yourself (DIY) turf-management research doesn't need to be costly or complicated. Simple, scaled-down, yet strategic techniques can assure you you're using the best tools to meet your course's distinctive needs.

Just about any golf course management technique or tool can be researched. Here's a short list of typical research subjects:

- **Turf varieties** — What grows best on your fairways: colonial bentgrass, creeping bentgrass or perennial ryegrass? Which variety of Kentucky bluegrass should you use in your roughs? Testing grass varieties side by side will help you learn the top performers for your course.
- **Herbicides, fungicides, insecticides and plant growth regulators** — Research can compare different products or one product with varying timing, rates or growing conditions.
- **Fertilizers** — What kind, when, where and how much?
- **Cultural practices and equipment** — Testing some of the many methods of aeration, topdressing, mowing, rolling and dethatching should show you what works best for your course.

Data collection basics

Similar to turf test plots at universities, you should visibly mark trial areas. Extensive mowing schedules make it nearly impossible to come back to your on-course research area two or three days later and know where you applied a fungicide or tried a different setting on an aerator. Identifying plots with marking paint and routinely remarking them

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so they can easily be found is crucial. It's also important to keep a written map of all trials.

Another recommendation is to replicate research. Say, for instance, you want to evaluate Insignia fungicide for summer patch control on fairway turf. Replicating the application two or three times allows you to evaluate the average of the results for a more accurate view of performance.

Always follow label instructions and use products during the same time period you would normally do so, especially for chemical products. The goal of DIY research is to learn how products work under your real-world conditions.

Location

There are several things to consider when choosing where on your course to conduct research. First and foremost, consider what you're studying and what the worst-case scenario might be. It may not be smart to test a new herbicide on a highly visible area of your course. Would you want to risk discoloring the 18th fairway?

Choose areas representative of your course as a whole in order to fairly evaluate products. When testing fungicides or herbicides, it's better to avoid areas with high or low disease or weed pressure. Utilizing an area that's typical of your course will make positive results easier to replicate on a larger scale when you start using a product in earnest. Similarly, avoid areas that are topographically unique. If only one portion of your course is hilly, for example, you probably don't want to do your testing there.

Research partners

Don't let the term "do it yourself" limit you. DIY research doesn't have to be done without help. You have limited time and resources, and seemingly unlimited responsibilities, so consider working with others — be they university researchers, manufacturing representatives or nearby superintendents. Partnering with others is a great way to continue learning and improve management techniques without being overwhelmed.

Working with university researchers can be particularly beneficial. Collaboration provides another set of trained eyes that can monitor results, provide recommendations and give insights into the latest turf-management trends. It also gives university researchers a real-world venue to conduct studies. All the while it improves your course for golfers. Everybody wins.

Other tips

- **Conduct research on small plots.** You don't want to tie up a lot of the course with research plots.

■ **Communicate results.** Post informal research results on your Web site or in your newsletter so members are aware of your efforts to improve the course.

■ **Beg, borrow and steal research ideas from nearby courses.** Introduce yourself to other superintendents in your region and pick their brains about what they're doing on their course. Chances are they're doing something you should try.

■ **Invest in and use a decent digital camera.** Before-and-after and side-by-side photos come in handy when evaluating research results. It's also a great way to show off your work to your board of directors or green committee.

Keep improving

DIY research is an excellent way to make your course the best it can be without breaking the bank. It's an efficient way to test new products, equipment and techniques so you know exactly what to expect when you incorporate them full-scale into your course management plan. ■

Miller, a senior technical specialist for BASF Professional Turf & Ornamentals, is based in Chesterfield, Va.

December THIS MONTH'S HEALTH TIP

Taking simple precautions for the upcoming holidays can ensure a happy, healthy time for you and your dog. Don't feed pets holiday treats or leftovers. Some foods such as chocolates, alcohol, uncooked bread dough, grapes and raisins can be life-threatening. Keep ribbons, tinsel, flower arrangements, electrical cords and holiday decorations away from pets. And don't forget about live trees; place them in a room away from your dog. To stop a Christmas tree from falling over, place a hook in the ceiling and use some nylon yard to attach to the tree. This will prevent it from falling over.

Trouble. His owner is Doug Richardson, superintendent at Overpeck Golf Course in Teaneck, N.J. *(Photo by: Dennis Crosby Jr.)*