

Unless you simply live with your head in a deep bunker, you must embrace the fact that pesticides and turfgrass aren't looking at a long future as soul mates.

It really isn't like there is some kind of war going on out there, but we now have a brewing debate over two opposing viewpoints. The Organic Crowd says, "Sure, man, we can be all things wonderful if we get off the bad stuff and get on the good stuff." The Chemical Crowd says, "You gotta have chemicals to have high-quality turf."

It's interesting that history is repeating itself here. The opposing viewpoints usually come from someone who is trying to sell you a product. If you're selling compost, you certainly don't align yourself with the petro-chem crowd. You throw rocks at their glass houses — and it's the same on the other side. I'm beginning to tune them all out because the objectivity of the debate has been lost.

Golf course management at the highest level is about *stewardship*. There's another buzzword that's been kicked around too much for my taste. In some cases, there will be situations where some form of limited chemical use may be required or even desired. So the notion of stewardship is really individual effort doing great things. I'm all for that.

The question comes up all the time, as I believe it has through the whole history of managing fine turfgrass: Is it possible to have an organic golf course? The division between organic vs. inorganic isn't as black and white as partisans on both sides would have you think. After all, it's nearly impossible to put a limiting definition on the word "organic."

To some, it means pesticide-free. To others, it means pesticide- and synthetic-chemical free. To yet another crowd, it means you're buying a new product that tells you in the sales literature that "you are being organic."

I can't hold on to any one definition. I've eaten plenty of organic produce and plenty from conventional farming, and the fact is that you can get bad-tasting food from either camp. It's the same for turfgrass. Organic programs and synthetic programs can both yield dead grass. For the transitional course that's

Debate Rages Over Organic Golf

BY DAVE WILBER



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moving toward more sustainable management, however, one little hiccup in appearance causes the voices from the other side to chant about not being able to grow grass without the chemicals.

Stories circulate about facilities here or there that have been organic. Some of them are so labeled because governments insist on it. Some of them earn the label because some superintendent decided to be a rebel. Some get the label from necessity because their budgets don't give them the purchasing power for much more than basics, which are often organic.

I'm lucky enough to get to see all kinds of operations and, label or no label, some courses are doing some really cool stuff. They don't give a hoot about being dragged into some Black Spy vs. White Spy debate about whether they're organic or not.

I keep getting the same phone call and the same e-mail from different people: Can we have pesticide-free golf courses? Of course we can. But will the customer — the all-knowing golfer who follows golf on the Internet, watches it on TV, quotes about Stimp readings and gabs about "who looks better than who" — accept some degree of blemished turfgrass because the superintendent decided not to use a plant-protection chemical? For there to be pesticide-free golf, players will have to allow for some different, more natural smells now and then.

I don't think golfers are ever going to ask for less from us Turfheads. Is it really possible to return to "Amish Turf Management" when so much pressure is on everyone to be perfect? Maybe, but waiting for the USGA to mandate a return to hickory shafts might be in the same line of thinking.

Dave Wilber is a Sacramento, Calif.-based independent agronomist who's in the field daily.

The Company Line

PRODUCTS & SERVICES



▲ Fountain spray patterns

Otterbine Barebo has added three new spray patterns to its Aerating Fountain line — the Comet, the Galaxy and the Saturn.

The Comet creates a thick column of water and is able to maintain its symmetry in blustery conditions. The two-tiered Galaxy is designed to minimize clogging and hold its pattern in windy conditions. The Saturn could be considered a compact version of Otterbine's Sunburst pattern. It produces a more condensed and fluid pattern.

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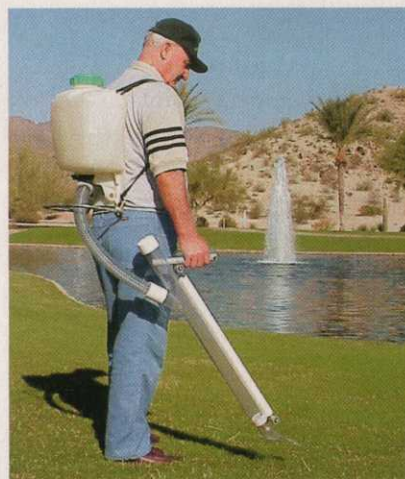
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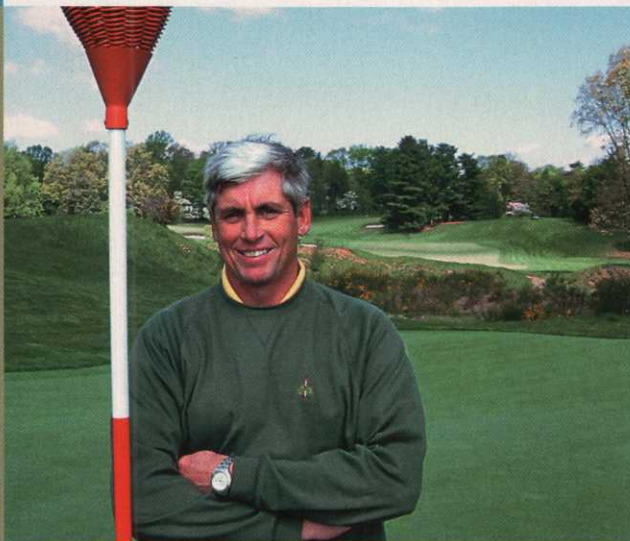
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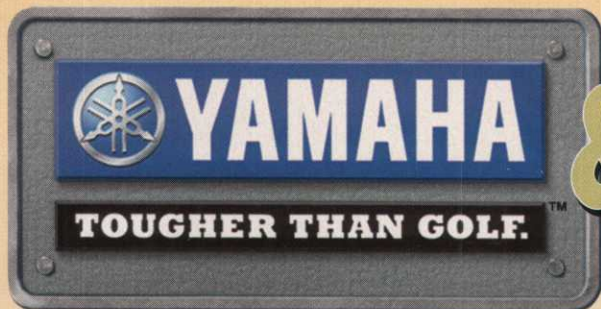
Matt Shaffer, director of
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LOCAL HEROES

Yamaha and *Golfdom* are partnering to pay tribute to superintendents around the nation who serve their profession as volunteer leaders of local chapter associations. Please join us in thanking these "local heroes."

BECAUSE OF THEM, OUR INDUSTRY IS A BETTER PLACE.

Jim Loke, CGCS

Bent Tree CC, Lancaster, Pa.
Member, Board of Directors, Musser Foundation

Jim has always been highly involved in local GCSA chapters and other golf-affiliated organizations. He became president of the Northern Ohio GCSA while working at Firestone CC and Quail Hollow Resort in Ohio. Then he became president of the Central Pennsylvania GCSA after coming to Bent Creek CC in 1992.



Despite the time consumed by these volunteer efforts, Jim says: "I've learned so much that has been invaluable. You deal with superintendents who are willing to share what works and doesn't work. The guys who are not involved are missing a lot of information and insights.

"You have a family, but your real family is also in the industry. I owe a lot to people like Joe Baidy, John Spodnik and Frank Dobie," he says.

Dobie, the current Musser Foundation president, said, "Like most people who volunteer, Jim is not doing it for credit, his own ego, or recognition, but rather because the work needs to get done."

Geoff Coggan, CGCS, MG

The Great Outdoors G&CC, Titusville, Fla.
President, Florida GCSA

The Americanization of the Brit from Sherwood Forest is complete. The transplanted Englishman not only is an American citizen now, Geoff is a past president of the Central Florida GCSA and current president of the Florida GCSA, the umbrella association for all 12 GCSAA chapters in the Citrus State.



He has called upon his fellow superintendents to get involved in legislative issues.

"There are issues that need a voice to express our concerns," he says. "We need to position ourselves as the experts to talk to before people who don't understand the business blindly write laws and ordinances."

Coggan is also one of only 31 Master Greenkeepers in the world.

Florida GCSA Past President Darren Davis of Olde Florida GC says of Coggan: "I respect Geoff immensely. He has been active, making sure the association not only gets through this year but looks toward the future."

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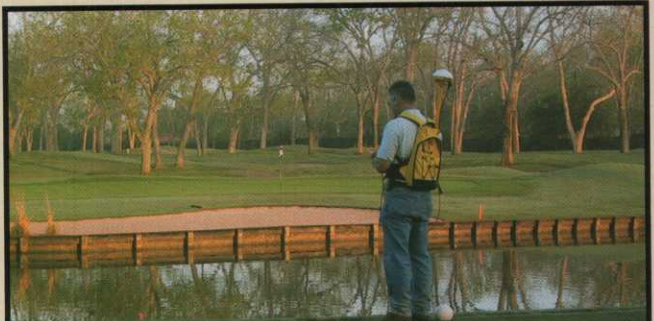
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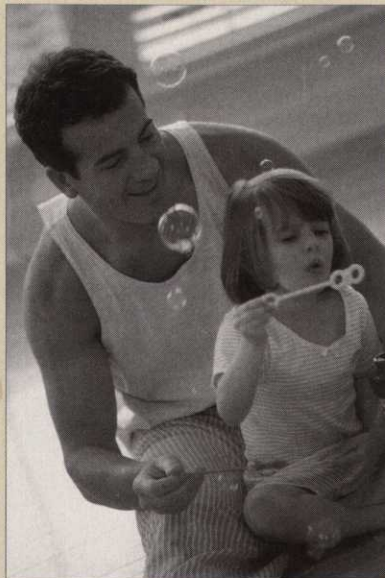
The second guy hits his imaginary ball, and lo and behold— it also lands on the edge of the green, right next to the other guy's ball! The first guy lines up and putts. "You won't believe it— my ball just rolled into the cup! I win!" he crows.

The second guy responds, "You won't believe it, either— you just hit *my* ball!"

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Out of Bounds

■ SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

swiss knives

I first saw it in my dad's dresser drawer, and it beckoned to me — shiny and puzzling with gorgeous curves. I pawed it with my 7-year old hand, and discovered the most practical item known to humanity — the Swiss Army knife.

I slid my little fingernails into the grooves and slowly unfolded a bevy of tools of varying sharpness and wondered how you could get it all in such a compact package. Even then I knew knives weren't toys, but how could a little boy resist a diminutive saw, a twisting corkscrew, that magnifying glass and those tweezers?

What I didn't know then was that the son of a Swiss hat maker leveraged everything back in the 1890s in hopes of making a quality knife/tool suitable for use by soldiers. But Karl Elsener lost his financial fanny because German mass-production crafted the knives faster and cheaper. However, Elsener went back to the drawing board and came up with a lighter, more versatile knife deemed The Officer's and Sports Knife.

That knife has more than 400 variations — small ones for key rings, pocket tools, a snappy golf tool, watches, cutlery and, the beauty of the line, the Swiss Champ, which features 33 different functions. In addition, the Swiss Army knife has been a favorite gift of American presidents to guests of the White House. The knives have



THESE MULTIFACETED TOOLS ARE AMONG THE MOST PRACTICAL ITEMS KNOWN TO HUMANITY BY MARK LUCE

been to the peak of Mount Everest, to the North and South Poles and even orbited the earth on the space shuttle. If that's not enough, the Swiss Army knife has saved lives. It was used to perform an emergency tracheotomy on a young girl and to cut the clothes off a man who fell into water during an expedition to the North Pole.

If you have one of these gems, you know how handy they are. If you need wine opened, desire to cut rope, need a close peek at the fine print or need to rid the frayed cuffs from your fancy clothes, the Swiss Army knife always saves the day. Beyond the sensible and practical uses, the knives are a triumph of aesthetics and engineering. Unlike so many things American, the Swiss know how to

merge style and substance. Outside of the standard knife, there are two Swiss Army products that will provide instant relief in the car or on the course. First, the SwissCard is the size of a credit card (and double the thickness) and fits snugly into a wallet. Whip it out and you have scissors, a letter-opener/blade, nail-file/flat-head screwdriver, a small pen, tweezers, a toothpick, a straight pin and a ruler. It's only about \$27 and makes a great gift.

The other is the Swiss Tool. Sleeker and stronger than other brands, the Swiss Tool (\$75) features 24 different items to help you get through a day on the course. Wire cutters, five screwdrivers, a couple of blades, a crimper, can opener, and, of course, pliers. It folds together nicely and can be worn in a sheath on the belt.

I'm looking at my three Swiss Army tools right now, especially the standard knife that makes its home in my desk drawer. I find myself wondering when I will pass the knife along to our son, Miles. Whenever that is, I'm sure the knife will be as good as new.

Mark Luce sharpens his blade in Kansas City, Mo. You can reach him at mluce@earthlink.net.

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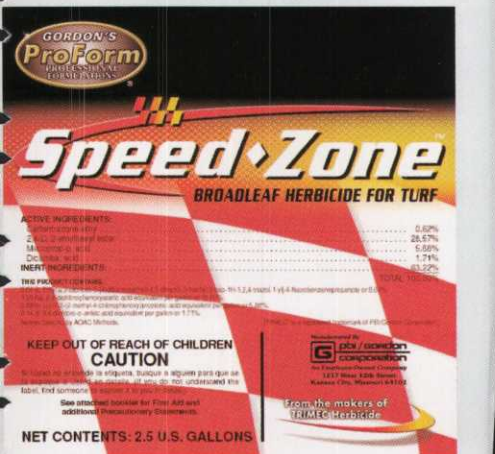
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