



WINTER SPRING, SUMMER SPRING

By Monroe S. Miller

Anyone who has lived in Wisconsin for more than a couple of years knows we actually have five seasons — summer, autumn, winter, winter spring and summer spring.

Most of us opened our golf courses in winter spring this year. There were a lot of March openings again; that seems to be happening more and more. I cannot fathom opening for golf as late as mid-April; the year when many Madison golf courses opened in late April seems to be in another age entirely.

The week of 70s during the middle of March got everyone in our world — players, pros and superintendents — excited about a new year of golf. An early opening was the best thing that could have happened. Even the single digit temperatures that followed those 70 degree days couldn't dampen the high spirits, excitement and anticipation of a new season.

As I put these lines on paper, there is a sense that summer spring is around the corner. The harsher days of late March/early April have given way to the more gentle and greener days of late April/early May. We are seriously thinking about putting irrigation intakes in place in Lake Mendota. The celebrations over the great UW win in the NCAA hockey championship game have subsided, and we are thinking about going to a Brewers game. It seems we have turned the corner on this season.

Despite the early and extended cases of spring fever, brightened spirits inspired by early rains are dampened by questions and worry over drought conditions.

The nearly two inches of rain above normal we've had in our town haven't helped much to alleviate my own fear of a continuation of dry conditions. That two inches of rain came on frozen soil and quickly ran off; trees desperate for subsoil moisture are still thirsty and groundwater supplies are still low. The

beneficiaries were surface water supplies, and that isn't all bad when you irrigate your golf course from Lake Mendota or similar bodies of water.

So I'm still praying for rain. The 1990 Farmers Almanac offered some solace. March 7, 9 and 10 represent "Ember Days". The weather that falls on those days supposedly gives clues of weather in upcoming months. Based on those days in 1990, the weather in two of the following three months should be rainy. Coincidentally, the NWS is predicting the same!

Weather lore also holds that the first frost of autumn comes six months after the first thunderstorm. For us, that means we'll get our first frost on September 8th, six months after our March 8th thunderstorm. That's awfully early.

Climatologists at the Midwest Climate Center report that "the odds suggest continuation of a four-year drought in the midwest well in 1990." The drought we've been experiencing is the worst since 1961, when an eight-year dry spell ended. Pam Naber, of the Wisconsin State Climatologist's office, concurs for our state.

There are areas in Wisconsin that are 10-20 inches behind in rainfall for the last two years. That kind of deficit isn't made up overnight; in the worst areas it will take about six consecutive "normal" years for underground aquifers, wells, lakes and reservoirs to recover.

Grave digger reports from around Wisconsin indicate there is very little moisture at all in the top six feet of soil in many parts of the state.

Spring is a season of optimism for most people. This year, that optimistic attitude may be especially important for those managing golf courses. It may be another dry year for us.

The Sierra Club is famous for lobbying for environmental causes. More than a few times they've been off target.

They loudly promote recycling, espe-

cially of paper products. That makes sense since the club was founded to preserve wilderness areas and natural parks.

Well, a couple of branches finally looked in a mirror and didn't like something they saw. They started to squawk over a hypocritical practice of the Sierra Club.

The Sierra Club's annual fund raising calendars AREN'T printed on recycled paper! Figure that one out.

After a lot of member pressure, those two "trouble-making" chapters stopped selling the calendars. Nothing was heard from other chapters.

One might suggest that the Sierra Club get its own priorities straight before launching its next attack on one of us.

I like tractors a lot, both the real ones and the toy ones. I've been driving them since my mid-grade school days.

It was a pleasure buying one (a real one) last year, too. But not until I knew I was going to get a U.S. made model. The Ford 2910 we purchased was, according to Neil Richter, one of the last of its kind made in Ford's Troy, Michigan tractor plant. All-American products, like smaller tractors, are made in the U.S., one would assume.

Well, assume otherwise. Nearly 80 percent of ALL farm tractors sold in our country are made by foreign workers.

Virtually all tractors under 100 horsepower sold here are made overseas. One exception is White; they are making a line of smaller tractors in plants in Ohio and Iowa.

Henry Ford would turn over in his grave if he knew. So would Jerome Case.

We in Wisconsin should weep. Many smaller tractors used to be made within our borders — Case, Allis-Chalmers and Massey-Ferguson. Now they are made in Tokyo and Seoul, among other foreign places.

"Don't worry," some say. "Despite unit numbers, the total dollar volume

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of the 20 percent made here is equal to the 80 percent foreign made dollar volume."

"Fine," I say. "Have you ever tried to mow roughs with a Ford TW-25? And how many 180 horsepower John Deere rigs do you think Japan and Korea are buying from us?"

On the same day I read this report on foreign tractors, I read a report about the nations that lead the list of unfair trade practitioners against U.S. made products. Guess who was on top of the list?

Japan. Who followed?

Korea. Then Taiwan. Then China.

Is this "Japan bashing"? If it is, so be it.

Should I ever need to buy another tractor, I'll buy a used one before I'll buy one from across the Pacific.

It's a sign of the times, I guess. I received a letter from Dr. Leo Walsh, Dean of our College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, telling of the UW-

Madison's first field testing of a genetically engineered organism.

It is a genetically engineered bacteria designed to improve crop yields. It will be tested on the UW's Arlington and Hancock agricultural research stations. The 40 plots, with a total area of under one-tenth of an acre at each station, will help researchers improve yields of several crops and many help reduce the use of commercial fertilizers.

Crops that may benefit are peas, beans, soybeans, clover and alfalfa (all nitrogen-fixers). The work is being done by the UW Department of Agronomy.

Can you imagine the research that could conceivably be going on at the NOER CENTER in the coming years?

Add Mariel Hemingway, Allyce Beasley ("Moonlighting"), John Ratzenberger and Ted Danson ("Cheers") to your Meryl Streep list of Hollywood types who seem to know everything about the environment.

This group has been railing at California's effort to control the Medfly with malathion. The aim of the California Secretary of Agriculture is to save the citrus industry in a safe and responsible way. The actors disagree.

Since this talented group is so serious about the (non)use of agricultural pesticides, there really is only one effective way for them to protest, in my opinion anyway.

They should quit eating. Through this sacrifice, they'll become martyrs. Their reruns will see ratings increase.

For me, please pass the grapefruit.

Have a good summer. One final thought: there are a lot of interesting things going on in golf course management around Wisconsin. I'd like to share them with our readership, which is to say I'd like to share them with your colleagues and peers. How about some help? The requirements are simple — the decision to contribute, a sharp pencil and a tablet of paper.



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