



Meet Dr. Meyer!

Editor's Note: *Dr. Julie Meyer is settled in her position as an assistant professor of plant pathology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.*

Many WGCSA have heard Dr. Meyer lecture this past winter. Few, however, have had time to get to know her on a more personal basis. With that in mind, Julie very kindly agreed to share with us a bit of her personal history, some of her first impressions, and a few of her dreams and goals.

Read and enjoy. You'll certainly know her better if you do.

I grew up in Minneapolis, Minnesota and still go back there often to visit my family. I didn't go to the University of Minnesota, however, I went to the University of California, Riverside for my bachelor's degree in Plant Science. The Riverside campus, located east of Los Angeles, towards the mountains and desert, is a small campus and was once an Agricultural Experiment Station for growing citrus. This gives you an idea of the biggest crop grown in that area.

It was during my studies in plant science that I was introduced to the field of plant pathology. I was always very interested in growing plants and it has been a hobby of mine since high school. It seemed I was always growing something—cacti from seed or some new houseplant I spotted in a greenhouse. So I taught myself what plants need to grow with health and vigor and I think it impressed me to learn that there was a discipline called plant pathology that was the study of how to keep plants healthy. I felt like I understood how plants grow and thrive and that I wanted to learn more of the biology of what was going on and how to protect plants from disease—in short, to be a plant doctor!

After my bachelor's degree I was fortunate to receive a Fulbright scholarship to work and study in Hannover, Germany. I'm not sure what compelled me to enter the competition, since I spoke very little German. I had been to

Germany once before, after high school when I participated in a "work-exchange" program in England and in southern Germany that gave me a chance to work in greenhouses in exchange for wages and a chance to live in these countries for a year. Perhaps it was my German heritage on my father's side (Meyer is one of the most common names in Germany, I found out) that I felt I wanted to spend more time there. It was also a way to travel the world for someone who didn't have much money. So I spent over a year at the Institute of Plant Disease and Plant Protection in Hannover, attended classes and completed a little research project on root fungi of lettuce.

When I returned from Germany I decided to continue in graduate school and chose Oregon State University because of a good program in soil microbiology and root pathogens and an opportunity to do my research in the USDA Horticultural Crops Research Station in Corvallis. From there I went back to Germany again, to the Institute of Plant Ecology, this time to work on the forest decline problem that they thought was being caused by acid rain. In 1987 I went to North Carolina State University and began work on my doctorate. I worked on an interesting project on soil fungi and how they are affected by chemical properties of the soil. One of the fringe benefits was that the field work was conducted up in the Appalachian mountains of North Carolina, which is a very beautiful part of the country.

I am happily married to a wonderful man, Wayne Thal, who is also a biologist and computer specialist. He is currently writing computer software for teaching biology in the Vet school at UW-Madison. We are expecting our first child late this summer and live in a pretty neighborhood close to campus and Lake Wingra. We walk in to campus every day.

I was adjunct assistant professor at NC State for two years before coming

to Madison. My appointment here at UW-Madison is 75% extension and 25% research, with responsibility for turf and for field crops. I find the extension/research a perfect mix of responsibility because it allows me to bring my research results directly to the people working in the industry and to steer my program toward the needs of the industry. It's very satisfying to know that what you find out about biology is of direct interest and use to the people of Wisconsin.

I have not yet had direct experience with turf pathology but am familiar with many turf pathogens—most are found on other crops, too. I'm very excited to learn how they behave on turf and I think turf will be a wonderful system to work on, with lots of opportunity for biologically-based disease management.

In the face of environmental concerns about the use of mercury-based fungicides, and the heavy disease pressure that especially northern superintendents face, the management of gray snow mold will be a major research focus in my program this year and in years to come. Cultivar trials, nonmercury fungicide evaluations, fungicide timing, evaluation of brewery waste extracts and other organic materials, and testing of potential biocontrol organisms will all be part of a long-term, integrated program on managing snow mold. This work will be conducted in both southern and northern locations. Frank Rossi and I will collaborate on some of this work since snow mold resistance and cold hardiness are closely related topics.

Gayle Worf did excellent work in discovering the pathogen that causes necrotic ring spot on Kentucky bluegrass disease. I would like to continue studying the biology and management of this pathogen. We will attempt to establish a disease nursery of necrotic ring spot for demonstration as well as research purposes. There will be cultivar trials of several turf species at the

Noer facility, including the NTEP perennial ryegrass plots, with 96 cultivars. We know there are interactions between turf fertility and turf diseases, and this will be an ongoing area of study. This year we plan to evaluate the effect of acidic fertilizers on the management of summer patch on *Poa annua*, and if organic fertilizers have a suppressive effect on turf diseases. We have excellent weather data equipment at the Noer facility and I will begin to organize this data for use with disease forecasting models that are available for several diseases, including dollar spot, leaf spot, and Pythium.

The O.J. Noer Research and Education Facility is a researcher's dream. A field laboratory will be so important to turf research, and what a fine facility it is. I can hardly wait to get out and begin seeding the land. The building itself is so pleasant and comfortable and we are beginning to set up a wet lab with microscopes and lab equipment. I know I will spend lots of time there.

I'm impressed at how educated, informed and open-minded the members of the turf industry are. I get the distinct impression that they are inter-

ested to learn about the biology of turf diseases and that is very motivating to me. And I enjoy the friendship that seems to unite the group—it's a refreshing thing to see.

The UW turf team is a real team. This is a group that is ready, eager and willing to work together on turf and it's a perfect style for me. We've been on the road together all winter and we're full of plans and camaraderie.

Gayle seems to be enjoying his retirement very much but I have been able to get him to campus a few times to talk turf. I'm always full of questions. He is a generous resource person and I'm sure I will call on him many times. He is a storehouse of knowledge.

First Impressions

Wisconsin: diverse state. Like the rolling hills of the south, the northwoods, the many lakes

Madison: pretty city, friendly neighborhoods, great bookstores

UW-Madison: big, active institution, inspiring environment to work in

UW campus: can't wait to walk the path from Russell labs along the lake to the Memorial Union Terrace

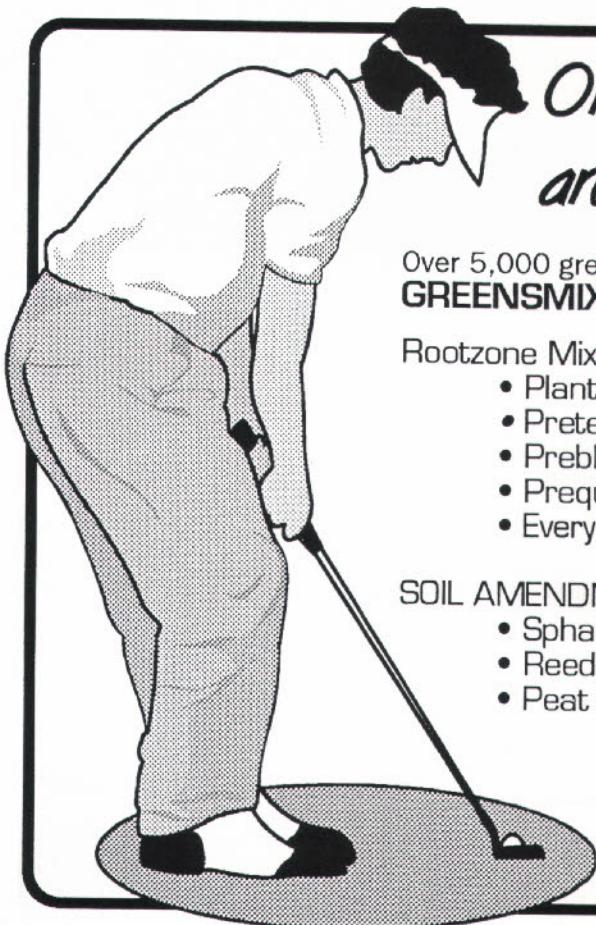
Wisconsin weather: long winters!

didn't miss one day of it either, arriving in December. Can't wait to see the grass grow!

We've had several prospective graduate students visit the department this spring and I hope to take one on to work on turf. I'd like to get them going on snow mold projects.

I love to spend my free time, what there is of it!, with my husband at home—we are great friends. I like to cook, garden, and love to settle down with a good book (not always about science!).

I think *THE GRASS ROOTS* is a first class publication and admire it's style, readability and the amount of useful information each issue contains. I look forward to contributing to it. Later in the season I thought it would interest the readers to get a update on the first year of plant pathology research at the Noer facility. By this fall, I would like to write a more in-depth article about snow molds and snow mold management. I would love to hear from the readers what pathology topics they would like to see—I would be more than happy to do some background work and write it up! 🌱



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