

Wisconsin Turfgrass Disease Diagnostic Lab: *Golf Along the Nile*



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Pyramids, the pride of Egypt, stand guard at the southwestern edge of the ancient city of Cairo. They seem to hold back the explosive construction of new apartment complexes needed to house the growing city of 15 million. It is nearly impossible for us Wisconsinites to picture Cairo. It straddles the River Nile at the southern tip of the Nile delta. On the north, a fertile plain extends to the Mediterranean Sea, and on the other three sides are desert sands without limit.

A visitor's first impressions are of 1) unbelievable traffic jams with cars, buses, donkey carts, camels, sheep and people all trying to get someplace as fast as possible; 2) tan apartment buildings everywhere with small shops on the ground floor and apartments on upper floors; 3) men in all kinds of dress from business suits to galahbiahs, long gowns of heavy cloth; 4) dust, dust, and more dust in the polluted air from millions of cars running on leaded gas; and 5) the muslim calls to prayer five times per day starting at 4:00 a.m. and finishing at 8:00 p.m. Mosques are everywhere so one is always within hearing distance of the "call to prayer."

Through this complex city of ancient culture and modern buildings runs the Nile, the longest river in the world. Situated on an island in the Nile in the heart of Cairo is the Gezira Sporting Club, the home of one of the two 9-hole golf courses in Cairo. Mr. Mohmoud Erfan, superintendent of the golf course and President of Egyptian Golf Federation, visited with me in fluent English. He had received his M.Sc. Degree in Food Science from the

University of California-Berkeley in 1945 and started work at the Gezira Sporting Club in 1949.

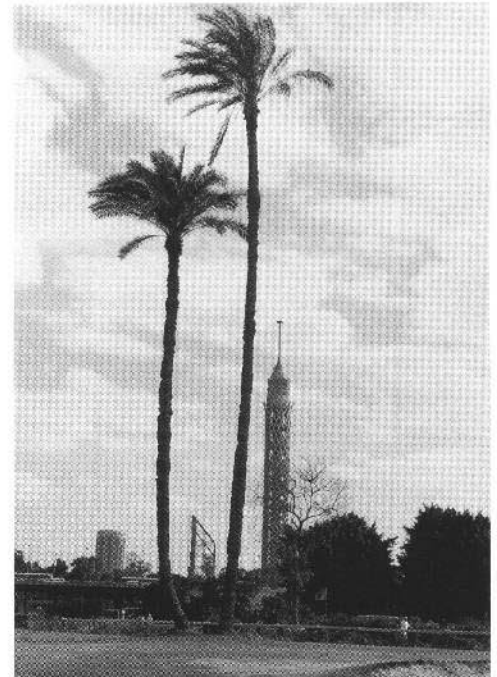
He remembers the beautiful 18 holes which were reduced to 9 during the time of President Nasser. The nine fairways have 14 greens and occupy 19 acres. The Gezira Course was constructed in 1890 using a "foreign grass from Kenya or South Africa for the greens." "Diseases are not a problem," Mr. Erfan comment, "but the invasion of weeds into the greens is, along with the difficulty of getting enough water." Fairways are flood-irrigated about once each week. When we arrived, Mr. Erfan was reviewing literature for a new sprinkler irrigation system from the USA.



Cairo is a heavily populated and busy city.



Narrow streets add to the sense of confusion.



The Gezira Sporting Club in Cairo, Egypt.

The golf craze has hit Cairo, according to Mr. Erfan. Four new 18-hole golf courses are under construction at the edge of the city and Mr. Erfan is a consultant for one of these. It will occupy 270 acres and include an 18-hole golf course, a clubhouse, apartment houses and villas.

Golf is not for everyone in Cairo as it is extremely expensive. To play nine holes at the Gezira Sporting Club costs \$25 US, as much as many people make in two weeks of work. But for those who can afford it, the Gezira Sporting Club offers a quiet spot in the middle of a bustling, noisy dusty city.

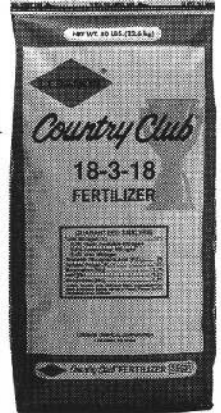
Personal note: You may ask, "why was Doug Maxwell in Cairo?" I was invited by the Director of the Plant Pathology Research Institute, Dr. Hamed Mazyad, to review the plant virology program there and to give a seminar. Most importantly, I was asked to design a collaborative research program for developing salt-tolerant tomato hybrids with resistance to the devastating viral disease, tomato yellow leaf curl.

Our laboratory, along with Asgrow Seed Co., had just filed for a patent on a new procedure which uses recombinant DNA methods for engineering plants with resistance to viruses. I visited with persons engaged at all levels with this problem, from students to the Minister of Agriculture. From these many visits emerged a research proposal, and now I wait to see if it will be funded.

Research funding for many projects in the Middle East comes from the United States Agency for International Development, which annually provides about \$2 billion in funding for Israel and Egypt. This may seem like a large number, and it is. But the US ranks tenth in all foreign aid as a percentage of gross national product, falling behind such countries as New Zealand, Sweden, Denmark and Norway. 🌿

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