

# The Grass Roots

Vol. XXII, No. 6  
November/December 1994

*The Grass Roots* is a bi-monthly publication of the Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents Association, printed in Madison, Wisconsin by Kramer Printing. No part of *The Grass Roots* may be reprinted without expressed written permission by the Editor.  
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## About the Cover:

USGA Green Section Agronomist Jim Latham will be officially retired at the end of this year. He spent almost all of his career in Wisconsin, most recently with the Green Section and with MMSD before that. He will be missed by many.

Cover artwork by *Grass Roots* guest artist Gene Haas!

"I walked to that tree across four miles of moonlit snow. Snow? No, it was a floor of diamonds, a magical world, so beautiful that my heart still aches with the wonder of it."

— Hamlin Garland  
from West Salem, Wisconsin  
"My First Christmas Tree"



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(Left to Right) Scott Schaller, Mike Handrich, Tom Schwab, Bruce Worzella, Bill Knight, Mark Kienert, Mike Semler, Joe Kuta and Pat Norton.

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# JUST WHAT DO YOU DO DURING THE WINTER?

By Michael Semler



Now that fall is behind us and winter is quickly approaching most golf course superintendents will finally be able to relax and get a normal schedule back into their lives. But wait, there is just one more question that needs to be answered. Somebody asked me it again the other day.

We have all heard it. It is probably one of the most ridiculous questions ever asked (never mind what your teachers told you). In fact, there is such a thing as a dumb question, and it is usually directed at the golf course superintendent. It goes something like this: "just what do you do during the winter?"

As usual, I smiled and gave a kind description of what it really takes to operate a golf course in both the summer and the winter. My response gave the usual listing of items that need to be accomplished during the winter in order to make a golf course operate as professionally and effectively as it does during the summer. We have all made out the lists before and we all have presented them to people at some time or another and we all have received the same response at the end of the presentation. It sounds something like, "Ohhhhh".

This type of question really bothers me. It is one of those things that can really get to me. I just don't know what they think. These people must believe that accountants work only during tax time and then do nothing the remaining part of the year. They must believe that football players only work during

the game and have nothing else to do with the rest of their time. Or, more than likely, they just don't think!

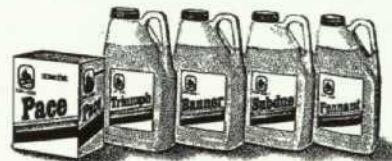
In most instances, our profession is being elevated beyond the stereotypical "Carl" from the movie *Caddy Shack*. We are no longer thought of as the "head grasscutter", at least not in thoughtful and knowledgeable circles.

I must admit, however, that I know of a few bastions of resistance to this thinking that still exist. Some of them are so close to home that they actually reside in our own clubs. In fact, it was only a few years ago at the GCSAA annual banquet that the president of the CMAA addressed the golf course superintendents present as "head greenskeepers". I guess that is not as bad as "head grasscutter", is it?

We have, in fact, come a long way in the past 20 years. Our profession is being elevated to one that does include upper management. We are being recognized as professional, well-educated, loyal, hard working individuals. Our profession is being recognized as well educated and influential in the golf community. In fact, many golf course superintendents are being elevated to the position of General Manager, above the clubhouse managers and the golf professionals. The reason? We are good managers in all necessary departments — personnel, accounting, motivation, leadership, master planning ...).

However, we still have a long way to go. I offer as evidence the question that was recently posed to me, "what do you do during the winter?" Many people do not entirely understand what we do. And as I have mentioned in previous articles, it is up to each and every one of us to make certain that these people begin to understand. If we don't tell them, nobody will! 🙄

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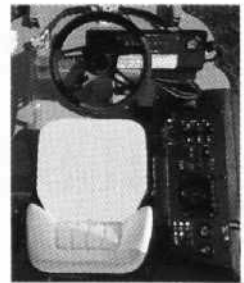
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# AS THE WORLD TURNS

By Monroe S. Miller

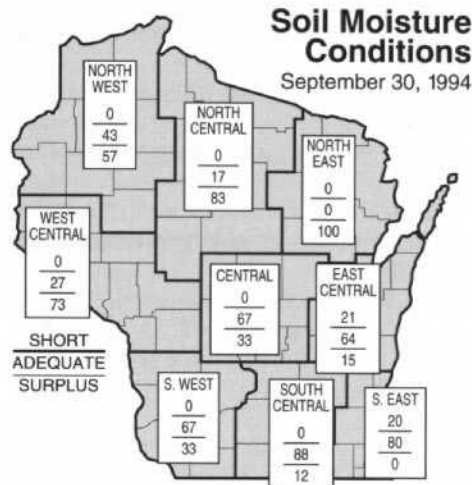
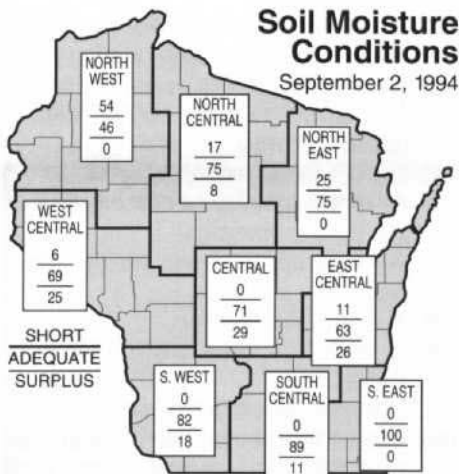
Wisconsin's seasons work magical and great changes in the landscape of her golf courses. None are greater than the move toward winter. There is far more difference between a Wisconsin golf course in summer and the same golf course in winter than there is between a golf course in San Diego and a golf course as far away as Sao Paulo at any time.

Places like Wisconsin have seasons that are strong and we have no need to travel around to experience seasonal changes. The changes come to us. I used to think that someday people would wise up and we'd have reverse migration - people from the south would begin to settle north. The older I get, however, the more I doubt that!

All of us mark the passage of time by the rotation of the earth on its axis. The succession of day and night affects everybody. Golf course superintendents are among those in a much smaller group whose lives are greatly affected by the more gradual albeit grander movement of the earth in orbit around the sun. I think that's a blessing. Listen to the conversation among our members at a WGCSA monthly meeting:

"Looks like an early winter."

"It appears spring will be late, and so will opening day."



"The summer sure was hot."

"What a beautiful autumn!"

Sometimes seasons are what we talk about most. It's pretty hard to find anything more common among us, unless it is golf or grass itself.

Here is the good/bad scenario of this time of year, as I see it. We have just enjoyed another wonderful Wisconsin fall. And you'd better enjoy it — autumn is our shortest season. Consistently, it lasts from mid-September to mid-November. It isn't fair that the crisp and cool air, the bright skies and sunshine, the leaf color display and harvest time all have to be enjoyed in only two months.

The bad news is that winter is our longest season, going from mid-November until mid-March (or later). Don't kid yourself — winter starts over a month ahead of the official start day on December 21st.

Fortunately, now that we are in the November and December period, it is legitimate to begin to think about Christmas and Thanksgiving!

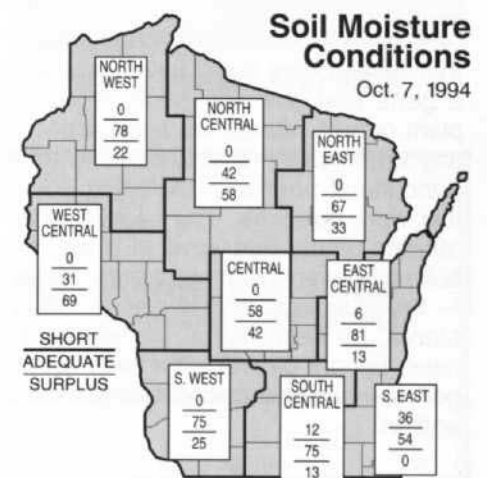
Figures from the Wisconsin Agricultural Statistics Service bear our what WGCSA members know very well—the weather in September and October was moderate. Cool temperatures and adequate rainfall set turf

areas up nicely for the cold weather coming. There was time for recovery, if indeed there were areas in need of such. Let's face it—by and large if you couldn't provide good golf conditions within budget in 1994, you're going to have problems in almost every year. This was a season dreams are made of. The accompanying soil moisture conditions graphics bear that out.

Me thinks we have a budding golf course writer in our midst here in Wisconsin. One of our WGCSA members sent me the following vivid paragraphs, composed by a staff member. The lines capture feelings and sights and smells we've all felt. It is entitled "Morning Mission":

*A red sky has just appeared over the horizon. A few long sunbeams steadily melt away the early morning fog like a wire through thick cheese, slicing the sky into thin sheets. A low rumble resounds throughout the valley but quickly fades. It comes again, sputtering at first, then remaining constant. A shed door flies open and warm steam spews into the cold morning mist. The scent of spent fuel drifts into the air.*

*A great machine emerges from the dull red shed. Its blades shine in the morning sun, while its operator wipes*



*sleep from his eyes. It surges forward onto a routine mission. The engine roars and wheels hum as the great leviathan heads toward number one fairway. The dew covered grass changes shades of green under its wheels. The blades are lowered like a final ceremony before a sacrifice. A lever is pulled as the horrifying blades begin to spin, unrelenting as they leave a wake of green carnage behind them.*

Are you wondering who the member is? Randy Witt. His note accompanied "Morning Mission": Monroe-Enclosed find a short essay that one of my high school summer employees wrote for his English Expository class. This business is always hustle and bustle. If one takes a moment to step back and look at what really goes on, it can be rewarding. Once in awhile we need to get back to that basic, away from fast greens, green rollers, PGRs and all the rest of it. If you might ever have a use for those paragraphs, feel free to use them. Have a great fall. Randy. P.S. My son Ryan is the writer.

The Editor is going to have to get to know this younger Witt! And isn't it great to see the pride a dad has in his son?

It was a big summer in the plant research arena. Supermarkets in Wisconsin started to offer genetically engineered tomatoes for sale. Due to the miracle of genetics research, growers can pick vine ripened tomatoes and ship them to stores, offering a tastier product than the green picked tomatoes subjected to gaseous ethylene for quick ripening after harvest. Calgene Fresh now sells tomatoes grown from FLAVR SAVR seeds. Calgene figured out how to block the enzyme that causes tomatoes to soften. The result is a vine-ripened veggie.

From Michigan State came news that researchers there have unlocked a gene that one day could regulate plant growth without the application of any chemicals. What a boon to any agricultural business, including ours, this work could be. The possibility of offering plants that grow in a way to suit us is overwhelming to think about — broad leaves, narrow leaves, small plants, no seedheads, winter hardiness, upright growth - the wish list of golf course superintendents goes on and on.

The feds have decided to coordinate efforts so that pesticide users will have something to use against diseases, insects and weeds when a pesticide is banned.

Under an agreement signed this summer, the EPA will list pesticides that are likely to be restricted or taken off the market. The agency will renew that list each year.

The US Department of Agriculture, sans its corrupt secretary Espy, will determine whether any substitute pesticide or pest control method can be found.

If no alternatives exist, the USDA will work with commodity groups (GCSAA, e.g.) and research institutions (UW-Madison, e.g.) to find alternatives, with some research financial aid by a new grants program budgeted in 1996.

New pesticides, biological controls or other substitutes will be given first consideration by the EPA. The emphasis will be on finding safer alternatives.

"With an early warning system, users will not be left empty-handed or with an equally risky chemical," said Sen. Patrick Leahy, a Vermont senator and chairman of the Senate Ag Committee. The agreement was signed by the departing Espy and Carol Bowner, EPA Administrator.

Nobody said how much money would be in the budget for grants, but \$20 million has been agreed upon for IPM, sustainable ag and other alternatives.

What will you remember about 1994 — good, bad or otherwise? Here's my list:

1. Worst dollar spot I have seen on my golf course in a long, long time.
2. A near absence of insect problems all season, unless you count the earthworms on fairway turf this fall. I know—earthworms aren't insects!
3. Earthworm casts on fairways this fall were a major pain in the neck and created a lot of conversation among our players.
4. I went to the Masters Tournament in Augusta.
5. Marsh Finner retired.
6. Jim Latham retired.
7. Ed Hasselkus retired.
8. EXPO 94 was a HUGE success.
9. FIELD DAY was AWESOME.
10. America rejected Hillary and Slick's health care plan, making it

abundantly clear they don't want a bunch of government workers meddling in their health affairs.

11. My daughter Holly graduated from the UW-Madison in May. In four years!
12. Ample and reasonably timely rainfall this summer.
13. Beautiful weather for most of the year.
14. A great spring because there was no winterkill.
15. Visited GCSAA headquarters.
16. LOTS of golf played on my course this year.
17. Record number of rounds of golf played in Wisconsin.
18. Celebrated my silver wedding anniversary.
19. A storm took the state's largest Shagbark Hickory, which had been on our course for well into its second century. See accompanying picture.



20. Changed assistant golf course superintendent in mid-year, and it worked out well.
21. Jen Eberhardt's covers for *The Grass Roots* and Steve Scoville's witty cartoons are both singular in our end of the golf business.
22. Governor Thompson is almost assured of re-election. He's one of my heroes.
23. My daughter Christie started high school.
24. My giant Atlantic variety pumpkins were, well, giants. Great growing year.
25. Baseball players went on strike and almost nobody noticed after a while, or cared.
26. NOER Research Facility really hit its stride, quickly becoming one of the best in America.
27. A moderate summer, for the most part.
28. A wonderful autumn.
29. A lousy GCSAA conference in Dallas.
31. Badgers won the Rose Bowl!
32. Arnold Palmer played in what was probably his last US Open. Golf won't be the same as a result.



Fortunately, it was at Oakmont, in western Pennsylvania where he was raised, near Latrobe. It was his 32nd consecutive Open, and he had his 65th birthday. He first walked Oakmont when he was 12 years old. Do you have a tear in your eye yet? Arnie did after he finished that last round.

- 33. Ozaukee CC was certified by NY Audubon Society as Wisconsin's first golf course wildlife sanctuary.
- 34. More and more courses are putting in new irrigation systems.
- 35. Wisconsin golf course superintendents found out there are substitutes for Calo-clor and Calogran.
- 36. My daughter Amy got home safely from France, where she had taught for a year.
- 37. We saw electric greensmowers for the first time.
- 38. Bees rivaled earthworms as an insect problem this year.

- 39. *The Grass Roots* won its category in the GCSAA Chapter Publications Contest.
- 40. I'm going to say it again, since it is so unbelievable: BADGERS won the 1994 Rose Bowl!



I took the photographs at the right in Moline, Illinois at the headquarters building of Deere and Company. Left to right are Marc Davison, John Maguire, Dave Brandenburg, Mark Kienert and Ed Kirchenwitz. John drove down, so we had lots of time to visit and to get to know one another. I really enjoyed their company and getting to know them all better. And we were all impressed by John Deere's corporate headquarters and saw some interesting looking turf equipment. There is no doubt — Deere is here to stay.



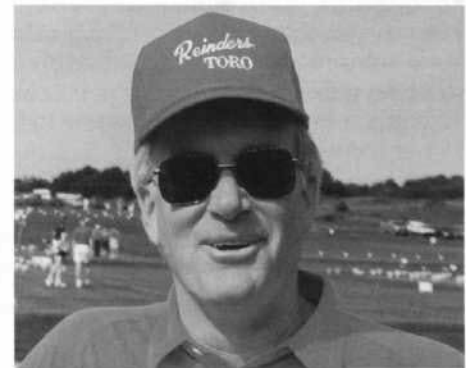
John Deere's Feed Back '94 group from Wisconsin.



Mutt and Jeff—The John Deere 9500 combine dwarfs their 2243 greensmower. There's likely a big price difference, too—the combine sells for \$168,000.



Finally, for your enjoyment, a photo of our second 25-year member of 1994, Dale Marach. He is holding up well, too! This was snapped while he was working at FIELD DAY in August. Congratulations to Dale.



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## *Bentgrass Response to Dormant Applied Milorganite*

By Dr. Wayne R. Kussow  
Department of Soil Science  
University of Wisconsin-Madison

The primary benefits of dormant application of Milorganite in Wisconsin are hastening of the breaking of dormancy by turfgrass and earlier spring greenup. Experience has shown that the effectiveness of the practice varies from season-to-season and site-to-site, even within the confines of a given golf course. One reason is varying viewpoints on what constitutes a dormant fertilization and, therefore, the time of fertilizer application.

One definition of dormant fertilization is application of fertilizer after turf shoot growth has ceased. This occurs when the turf is subjected to several consecutive days whose mean daily temperatures are 50 degrees F or less. In southern Wisconsin, this often occurs around October 15 to 20. Fertilization at this time is what I call late fall fertilization. I view dormant fertilization as fertilizer application that does not take place until the turfgrass has truly gone dormant; the turfgrass shoots turn brown and dry due to nighttime temperatures well below freezing and the soil surface temperature is below 32 degrees F. This often does not occur in Wisconsin before the advent of permanent snow cover. Thus, I also include in my definition of dormant fertilizer that which is applied when the weather forecast leads one to believe that permanent snow cover is imminent.

With my definitions of late fall and dormant fertilization, the distinguishing feature is when fertilizer N uptake occurs. With late fall fertilization N uptake occurs yet that season. In dormant application of a SRN such as Milorganite, fertilizer N uptake most likely does not take place until the following spring. The purpose of the present study was to determine what influences release of N from dormant applied Milorganite and what are the spring responses of creeping bentgrass response to these influences.

The study was established in the fall of 1993 in an effort to define the factors that regulate bentgrass

response to a dormant Milorganite application. One assumption made in designing the study was that turfgrass uptake of N from Milorganite must be preceded by microbial release of organic N. This assumption leads to the hypothesis that whatever enhances springtime warming of turf will favor microbial release of Milorganite N and, therefore, bentgrass response.

Absorption of radiant energy from the sun is what causes soil to warm in spring. Sunny days contribute more energy than do cloudy days and favor the warming process. But how rapidly soil temperature rises also depends on the nature of the surface that the solar radiation strikes and the heat capacity of the soil. Light colored surfaces reflect more of the solar radiation than do dark surfaces and slow soil warming. Once the radiant energy is adsorbed at the turf surface, the rate of soil warming is determined primarily by its moisture content. It takes much more energy to warm a wet soil than a dry soil because water has a very high heat capacity.

In the present study, I varied the color of the turf surface in two ways. One was as simple as mowing the

bentgrass at two different heights in the fall. The more light, tan-colored grass on the surface after snowmelt, the greater the amount of radiant energy that is reflected. I also varied soil surface color by topdressing in the fall with sand, soil, or charcoal. To create a difference in soil moisture in the spring, the study was conducted on two sites approximately 200 feet apart. One site was on a uniform 5% slope and the other on an area with virtually no slope. During snowmelt, water ponded to a depth of more than 6 inches on the flat site but quickly ran off the sloping site. Hence, while it was not measured, one can assume that a moisture differential existed between the two sites in early spring.

Ask any Soil Scientist and they'll tell you that for all practical purposes soil microbial activity virtually ceases when soil temperature drops below 50 degrees. If this were entirely true, then why snowmold? This line of reasoning led to the hypothesis that there is measurable microbial release of Milorganite under snow cover. To gain evidence for this, Milorganite was sealed in porous polyethylene packets that were placed on the turf surface at

*(Continued on page 11)*

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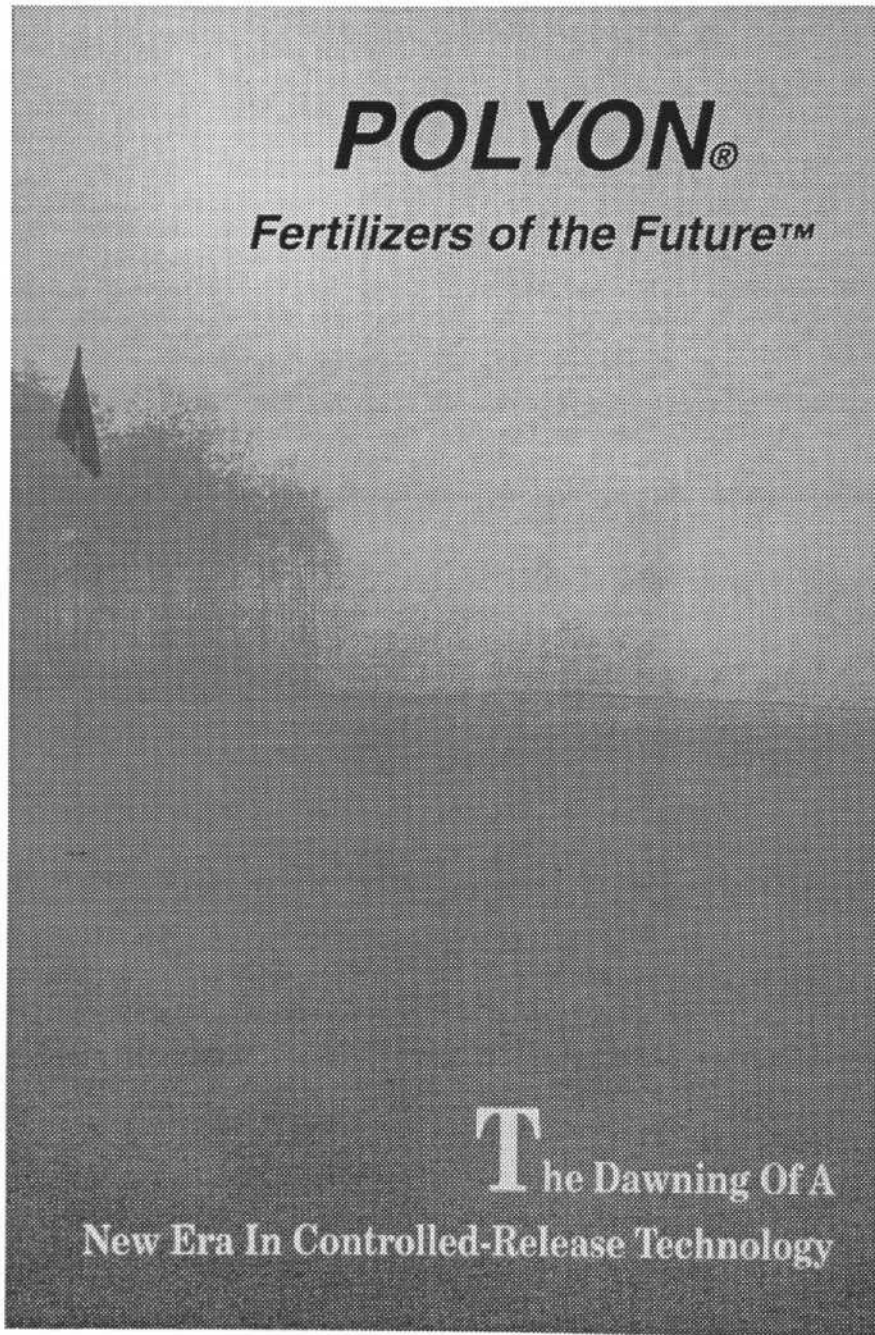




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