

# The Grass Roots

Vol. XXIII, No. 4  
July/August 1995

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## About the Cover:

Our cover features the favorite hole of Tom Harrison and of Vince Monahan. Tom's golf course, Maple Bluff Country Club, will host this year's Wisconsin State Open. Vince's course, Milwaukee Country Club, will host the 1995 Wisconsin State Amateur Golf Tournament. Milwaukee CC is celebrating its centennial year. Tom enjoys the sixth hole at the Bluff (top) and Vince likes the eighteenth (bottom) at MCC best.

The superb artwork is once again presented by Jennifer L. Eberhardt. Thanks to this talented artist.

I want to capture summer  
In the middle of a dawn,  
Press it fast between two pages now,  
Before the magic's gone.

"August"  
By Eileen Black

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Front row (Left to Right): Mark Kienert, Mike Semler, Scott Schaller, Mike Handrich. Back row (Left to Right): Kris Pinkerton, Dave Smith, Joe Kuta, Dave Brandenburg, Bruce Worzella.

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# Fairness

By Mike Semler



There are occasions when I get a sense of being completely helpless. This feeling always seems to come in the middle of the summer during hot and dry spells. It starts with one small occurrence, and then steamrolls in an entire series of events that finally culminate in one major ordeal.

The latest ordeal started about two weeks ago when a normally reliable pin setter decided to break the monotony by setting the pin in number 18 green on the top of a mound. The pin placement was clearly an unfair setting for the golfers, but this fine young person decided to put it there anyway.

You can imagine the uproar that followed because of the principles which were broken that morning. My guidelines on pin placement dictate that all locations should be fair for the golfer. This one clearly was not!

A few mornings later, in a matter of minutes after leaving the building, all of the equipment was back in the maintenance facility for needed repairs. Normally, we would have dealt with this in a cool, calm manner. However, this morning was our first shotgun start, and speed was of the essence. Unbelievable," I thought, "how every piece can leave in perfect working order, and return in such a short time for needed repairs." I must have walked under a stepladder that morning.

The final straw came a few days later on a rainy morning, when I decided it was time to clean out some old files. Included in this assortment were some past newspaper and magazine articles that I kept because something in them caught my attention and I figured I could use them later. Two of these articles pertained to two new courses that were on the verge of opening to play for the first

time. Included in the articles were lengthy comments about the staff additions made to the clubs, namely the golf professional and the clubhouse manager.

The articles gave very pleasant histories of these gentlemen and the positions they had previously held. Overall, they were very well written articles. Except for one thing. The authors forgot to mention one very key element in these golf course operations — the golf course superintendent! Shame on the authors for forgetting one of the most important people at any golf club.

The two superintendents at these two clubs had every right to be angry, because, once again, they were left out of the limelight. Their names did not appear in print and they received absolutely no recognition for the hard work they had done in the establishment of these golf courses. Most of that work had been completed before the golf pro or clubhouse manager were even hired. Nor did they receive any respect for the future value they would give to their respective memberships.

Those two superintendents were not the only losers when these articles appeared in print. Every golf course superintendent, everywhere, lost a little bit of identity that day. In addition, all the readers who read those articles were losers also. They weren't given the whole story.

The readers were being misled because the assumption in the articles was that the wonderful golf course the golfers were enjoying was there because of some faceless and a nameless identity. What a shame the readers did not get to know those two superintendents. They deserved better than that, and so did the superintendents.

Readers were being misinformed because one very key element in the management of those two clubs were left out. Without the golf course superintendent, most golf clubs would not exist nor survive as they do now. Not many positions in the golf club can say that!

I wish I could go back to that day when the pin location was misplaced on the 18th green and start all over. Maybe things would have turned out differently. My rule to employees on pin placements is to be fair. My rules on recognition and mutual respect are also to be fair. Unfortunately, not everyone plays by my set of rules, and on this morning, I did not feel golf course superintendents were treated fairly. ♣

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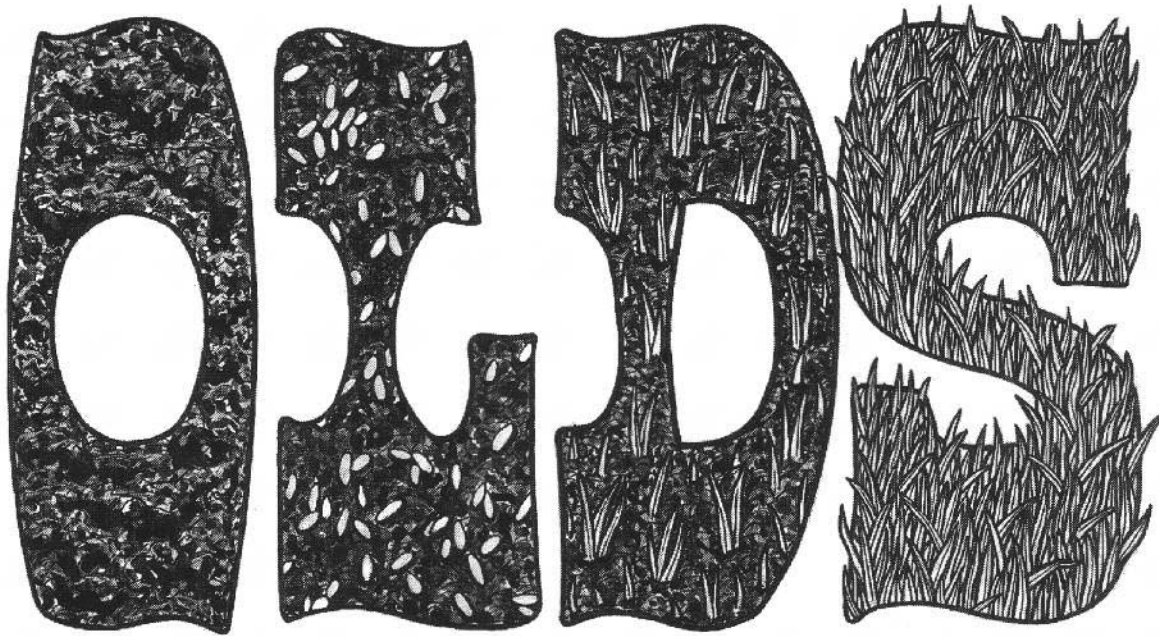
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# THE PERPETUAL SPRING

By Monroe S. Miller

Often times in Wisconsin, and probably elsewhere too, there is grouching about our spring season. The complaints, distilled down to a common denominator, go something like "we don't have a spring season in Wisconsin. We go from winter to summer in about a week."

That may be true some years, but not this year. In our town, golf courses opened earlier than ever before; winterkill was sparse and hopes were high.

Shortly after that early opening, however, the pleasant weather went south (or some other direction from here), leaving one of the coolest springtimes I can recall. There weren't many players on Wisconsin's golf courses, and the flags of Memorial Day fluttered in temperatures that were barely above 60°.

Everything was delayed—even by Memorial Day weekend not all of the trees were fully leafed out. It seemed to me that the University Arboretum had an exceptionally long and beautiful and late display of apple blossoms and lilacs. That's one thing nobody could complain about. And by June 1st, soil temps at two inches in our fairways were still below 60 degrees F, telling me that summer patch might be controlled by less material this season.

Annual flowers, weed control, aerification and a host of other activities normally completed "by the calendar" were running late this year. The lack of sunshine and enough rainfall to keep conditions wet hampered golf course work in Wisconsin, too. Instead of being done with by Memorial Day, the seeding of annual bluegrass was just reaching its peak. The groomer units were out in full force, trying to thin and speed up greens for holiday events. Pretty much, that doesn't work. Nature has the final say. And on the Memorial Day weekend, rain put the concern about green speed to rest in many parts of the state.

Once again recorded here are the excellent stats from

the Wisconsin Agricultural Statistics Office and our state climatologist for your edification.

Most members of the WGCSA are well aware of the Wisconsin Department of Justice's public intervenor office. Who could forget the town of Casey suit and how much worry and money were spent as a result? Russ Weisensele was occupied for a couple of years working to solve that dilemma.

In May, the legislature's Joint Finance Committee decided to ax the public intervenor's office from the Department of Justice. It eliminates all but one position and moved it to the DNR.

The new public intervenor would be prohibited by law from taking any action in court or from even participating with other groups. The intervenor would also have to withdraw from current lawsuits.

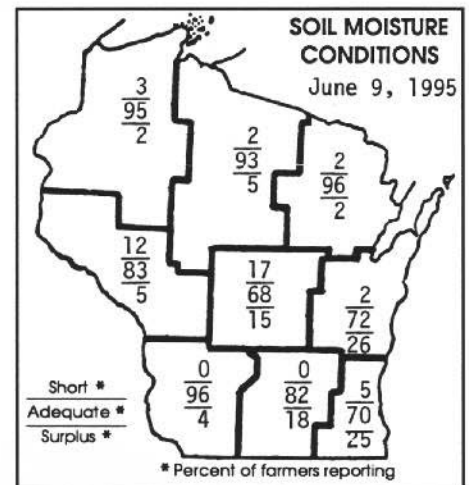
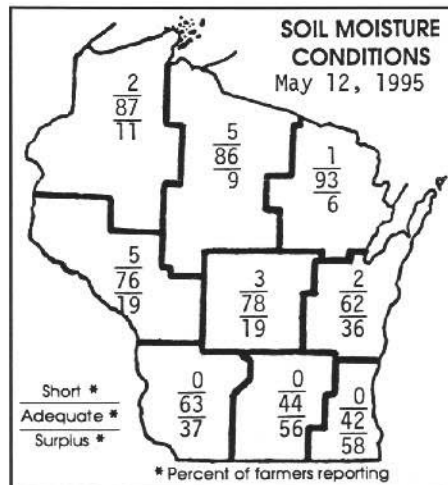
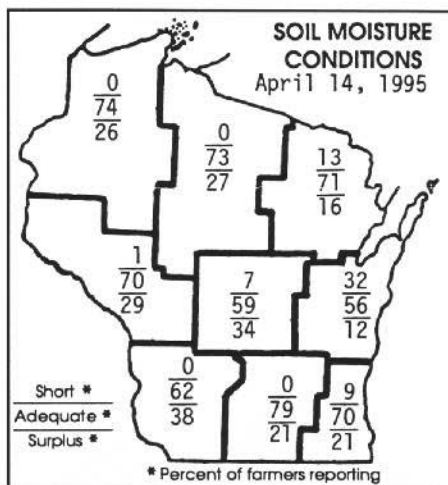
This was just one more move as elected officials work to reduce government, bureaucracies and bureaucrats. Predictably, certain groups were slathered with outrage in this town. It is fun to watch and listen to the goings on.

From the Joint Finance Committee the issue moves to the Senate and Assembly floors. We will watch for the outcome.

Everything in this life comes at a price, and UW-Madison entomologist Phil Pellitteri says the price for our mild winter past will be more insect problems this summer. He includes on his list some golf course favorites — cutworms and armyworms.

Be prepared; Phil is usually right in his predictions.

(Continued on page 7)



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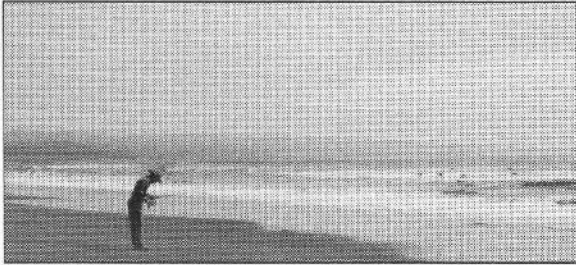
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(Continued from page 5)

The 1995 Masters is past awhile now, but closure for me cannot come without a comment about the winner, Ben Crenshaw. It is safe to say that Ben Crenshaw is a good guy and a deserving Masters champ.

Thanks to Milt Engelke, I was given the opportunity to have breakfast with Crenshaw at the GCSAA conference in Dallas a year and a half ago. He was there for Engelke's Bentgrass Research Inc., which developed Crenshaw creeping bentgrass. He struck me as a thoroughly sincere man who was very interested in bentgrass greens in Texas.

No wonder. This guy showed again, this time at Augusta, that he can putt. No matter that he is 43 years old.

Who cannot be pleased every time you see a nice guy finish first?

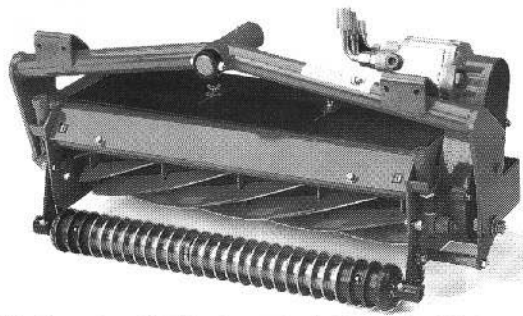
I received a great letter from Jim Latham early in May. You'll be glad to know that he and Lois are doing well in retirement.

He reports he is keeping busy scarring up the golf clubs "you kind folks presented to me." He is suffering through undulated, slick greens cut at 7/64 inches that are resulting in six hour rounds.

Redtail hawks, turkey buzzards and bobcats can be counted as neighbors, and his interest in wildlife is growing daily. Jim sounds like a contented new retiree, a well deserved emotion. To all of you he says "keep the peace and give our best regards to all."

Happy trails to you, until we meet again. Seems impossible, but that will be in September/October. My, oh my, where does the time go?! 🍷





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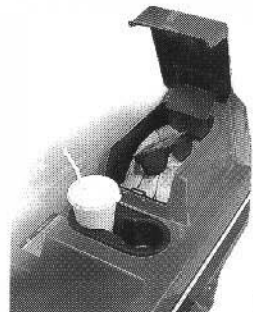
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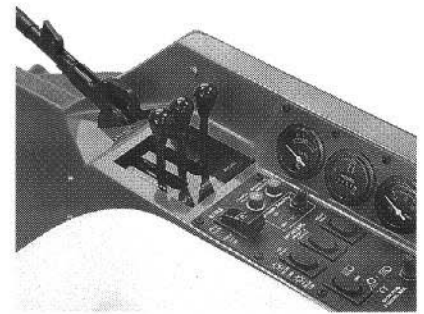
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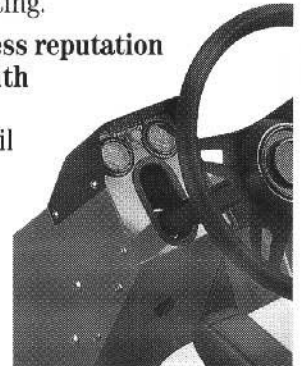


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# Wondering about Mowing

By Dr. Frank S. Rossi  
Department of Horticulture  
University of Wisconsin-Madison

*We want shaven carpets of grass here and there, but what nonsense it is to shave it as often as foolish men shave their faces! There are indeed places where they boast of mowing 40 acres!! William Robinson; The Wild Garden. 1894*

## Perspective

I wonder if in 1830 when Edwin Budding invented and patented the first mechanical push mowing machine for turf, he knew the impact of that act. As with all new technologies, mechanical mowing was slow to be adopted, with many courses relying on sheep to keep the grass mowed and *nurtured*. Piper and Oakley in the 1917 classic *Turf for Golf Courses*, wrote, "mowing machines are the most essential elements on every golf course." They even went so far as to recommend horse-drawn machines on clayey fairways even though "the use of horses may involve some unevenness of the turf due to the footprints of the animals."

Anyone with interest in the management of golf courses might say that the largest single influence on the industry over the last 25 years is not golfer expectations, environmental issues or labor concerns. Rather it is reduced mowing heights. Occasionally, I'll even get a group of superintendents to actually admit how low they mow. You'll hear cries of 140 thousandths, 130 thousandths, 125 thousandths and one or two who whisper, "sometimes I go down to 110 or 105. How much difference does 15 thousandths of an inch make on ball roll, wear tolerance and disease resistance? Does it matter how often you mow (mowing frequency)? Do you actually mow less when you use growth regulators? Is bench height of .110 on a triplex the same as .110 on walking mower? How much roll should an undulating green have before it is considered unfair?

## Mowing 101

*Underground.* From a purely physiological perspective, mowing is a shock to the turfgrass plant. The influences of low mowing, such as decreased carbohydrate synthesis and storage, decreased leaf width (except with Penncross of course), and most significantly decreased root growth rate and total root production are well known. And while these are all significant influences, the impact on rooting worries me the most. Dr. Beard suggested in the classic, *Turfgrass Science and Culture*, that close cutting heights may stimulate root growth regulator production in the leaves. This may help explain the physiological reason why plants mowed under close cutting heights typically have less root mass. Is this where biostimulants that contain cytokinins might help rooting under close mowing?

During my travels this spring I observed a substantial mass of roots on putting greens (it always makes me wonder if some of the concepts I learned along the way still hold water). Upon closer inspection I noticed that there were very few if any root hairs. Root hairs, which are rarely active for more than a week, are vital for maximizing absorption surface area. Are long roots without hairs as functional as short roots with hairs? I've seen beautiful white slender roots growing

down through deep-tine grooves without root hairs. Are these roots helpful to the plant?

*Aboveground.* Much of what is known about modern mowing practices is based on research conducted in the early 1960's by Dr. John Madison. Dr. Madison indicated that there are two distinct growth phases after mowing occurs. The first is the extension of the cut leaf (about a four day period) then followed by production of new leaves. Daily mowing, often times multiple daily mowing, must surely have a substantial impact on this physiological process.

Turfgrass leaves house the engine that produces the energy to power the system we call a plant. It follows that as you reduce the effective leaf area, less energy is available for growth and plant health begins to be compromised. Are we seeing more disease problems at lower heights? Are the plants predisposed to these problems because they are barely chugging along? Dr. Bruce Clarke at Rutgers University identified a clear relationship between incidence of summer patch of annual bluegrass and mowing height. Raising the height .025" increases the amount of leaf surface by 20% and resulted in a 20 to 40% reduction in disease incidence. They must be healthier plants.

*(Continued on page 11)*

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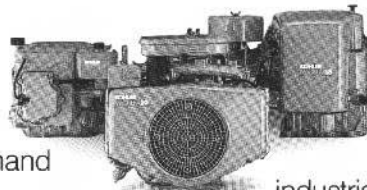
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