

really looking forward to this month's meeting at Somerset Country Club on May 12. For those of you who have never played there, you're in for a real treat. Somerset has one of the great golf tracks in the region and I for one am pleased to have the opportunity to play it for a second time. I am sure Mr. Gerlad Murphy will have things in great shape for us both on the course and at the dinner table.

Looking ahead, plan now to attend our annual picnic at Tartan Park. Mike Leitner is spearheading a big effort to make this year's event well worth attending. It promises to be like no other MGCSA summer picnic you have ever attended in the past, including the family!

I hope we get a little more "free" irrigation in May than we experienced in April. Natural rain water has a quality that grass plants definitely recognize.

SIMPLE QUESTIONS MAKE FERTILITY A PRIORITY

"It's not necessarily doing things right. It's doing the right things right." That's the message from many professional consultants and management trainers when they speak to groups. The key to success as a modern manager is setting priorities, they say.

Turf managers face the same challenge. Those that succeed know the priority of fertility management as part of their management responsibilities.

Less than 10 percent of a turfgrass management budget is allocated to fertility, and often less than 5," estimates Dr. D. B. Pfliegerer, general manager, Lebanon West, Lebanon Chemical Corp. "This small investment, however, can affect 50 percent of the outcome. An operator can maximize the quality of turfgrass with a minimal investment in fertilizer."

That kind of return on investment makes fertility management a priority for

today's successful turf professional.

Two critical aspects of fertility management are simple questions: "How much?" and "When?" - the same questions fertilizer salespeople ask each time they take an order.

For turf operators, however, these questions require a little more thought. The answers are not always simple.

To determine how much fertilizer is needed, the first step is fertility testing. "The objective is to supply plant nutrients that are deficient in the soil," says Pfliegerer. "The best way to do that is with soil and plant analysis."

Soil testing is a simple but often neglected practice. Standard procedures involve taking at least six one-inch diameter soil cores from an area that is uniform in soil type, topography, previous fertility treatment, drainage and other cultural factors. Separate samples should be taken where these characteristics are different.

A better measurement of the amount of nutrients available to the plant comes from plant tissue samples, which can be analyzed using a mass spectrograph, according to Pfliegerer.

He stresses that balance of important primary nutrients like nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) is the key in prescribing fertilizers and rates for turfgrasses.

Nitrogen sources should be a combination of slow- and fast-release products, which provides the safety margin needed to prevent turf burn and produces good color without causing excessive growth.

Pfliegerer says phosphorus is particularly important in establishing turf. "It stimulates early root formation, encourages vigorous beginning growth and provides winter hardiness," he explains. Potassium also increases plant vigor, which promotes disease resistance and aids in forming and moving starches and proteins, he adds.

Operators should request fertility recommendations for more than just P and

K, Pfleiderer advises. "Although turfgrasses require mostly N, P and K, there may be shortages of secondary and micronutrients."

He lists these nutrients and their benefits:

SULFUR..for color and growth; balances N for color and vigor; normally needed in high-volume watering conditions.

MAGNESIUM..balances the high K levels needed for vigorous, healthy turf; regulates uptake of plant foods; part of chlorophyll; necessary for forming sugar; especially for sandy soils.

MANGANESE..balances iron in high pH soils, particularly irrigated soils; accelerates growth process.

CALCIUM..creates good growth environment; promotes root growth and root hair formation; normally sufficient if pH is in the proper range.

IRON..affects color.

The second key question is "When?" Research has shown that timing of fertilizer application affects plant response. Temperature is more important than calendar dates, according to Pfleiderer. Spring and summer, which are the traditional seasons for application, may not be the optimal times, particularly for cool-season grasses like bluegrasses.

Pfleiderer reports recent research that indicates fall fertilization can provide many benefits for cool-season turf, including 1) increased shoot density, 2) better root growth, 3) less need for springtime mowing, 4) reduced weed problems, 5) improved color, 6) more tolerance to drought, and 7) less summer disease.

Heavy fertilization (one application in early fall, then a second, five to six weeks later), followed with a light treatment in spring (enough to green up the turf) and little or no summer feeding appears to be best for cool season grasses, he reports.

CREDIT: GROUND RULES, February 1987



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