

# Same Old, Same Old

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The two most common topics of discussion during Turf Advisory Service visits this season will come as no surprise to anyone: the unreliable nature of *Poa annua* and green spread. If I had a dollar for every green that lost a significant amount of *Poa* from either winterkill or midsummer heat stress, then I could probably afford a new set of Callaway woods. Last summer, the unusually mild weather caused little if any stress to *Poa annua*. Consequently, many courses in the nine-state Great Lakes Region entered the winter with a "bumper crop" of *Poa* on greens, fairways, etc. In fact, a number of courses in the northern transition zone, central to southern Illinois and Indiana, found that the percentage of *Poa* on greens increased during the winter. This came as an unwelcome surprise to a few superintendents who had made a considerable amount of progress reducing the amount of *Poa* through overseeding programs and the careful use of plant growth regulators.

Courses in the northern portion of the region were the first to experience significant losses of *Poa annua*. "Crown hydration" and to a lesser extent prolonged periods of ice cover caused severe injury in poorly drained, low-lying areas. Perennial ryegrass practice tees were also hard hit. To make matters worse, recovery of damaged areas was very slow this spring because of the cool days and cold nights accompanied by frost - conditions that persisted well into June in some areas.

Many courses throughout Wisconsin, northern Michigan, northwest Illinois and northern Iowa were affected by winterkill. Several very highly regarded golf courses were sodding entire greens this spring. Fortunately (as if there's anything fortunate about winterkill), the damage was so widespread that the superintendents' jobs were not in jeopardy and golfers generally took the damage in stride. There were, however, several exceptions. For instance, at one city course, an old-time golfer started a petition to fire the superintendent because he had obviously poured gasoline on the greens over the winter which killed the turf.

Courses in central to southern Illinois and Indiana were hit next. The mild summer last year left the impression that *Poa annua* wasn't all that bad after all. Many courses entered the summer with a "double dose" of *Poa* in greens and fairways because little turf was lost from heat or drought last season. Well, take all the *Poa* that should have died last summer, add that to the *Poa* that would normally die this summer, and for good measure add a very shallow root system caused by heavy frequent rain this spring and you have a time bomb just ticking away.

The bomb exploded around the end of July. Frequent heavy rainfall saturated soils to a point where they become very slow to accept any more water. A heavy early morning rain followed by a sunny, very hot and humid afternoon produced ideal conditions for wet wilt in low puddled areas of greens and fairways. If the turf didn't die outright, it be-

came very susceptible to the intense disease pressure from pythium and brown patch. Many superintendents had already used up their fungicide budget by August and had little to show for it. Active pythium on a perennial ryegrass tee was seen at 11:00 a.m. at one southern Illinois course. Losses of turf were sometimes blamed on more exotic problems such as "bacterial wilt" or nematodes, when simple heat stress was the more likely explanation for the injury. The take-home lesson: when the going really got rough, *Poa annua* died within several days while even the older varieties of bent remained in relatively good condition in spite of the heat and humidity. Often the difference between live and dead *Poa* was adequate surface and sub-surface drainage.

In contrast, the summer has been relatively mild in the central part of the region this year. Courses in Detroit, Chicago, Milwaukee and Minneapolis/St. Paul have not had the intense stress and severe injury experienced farther north or south. It was difficult shifting gears between visits. After all, how sympathetic could I be to a Green Committee Chairman who is disappointed about having only 9 to 10 feet green speeds after visiting courses for two weeks that would just like to have enough grass on the greens to slow the ball down (pure algae stimps at over 12 feet when dry).

The low handicap golfers tend to judge the quality of all the greens by the conditions on the flattest, easiest green on the course. The playing conditions on the most difficult, contoured green should dictate the speed of the greens if consistent conditions between greens are desired. I know, easy to say, but very difficult to convince the better golfers who constantly compare playing conditions between courses. Of course they are often invited to play other courses when that particular course has been primed for tournament conditions. They come home assuming that all courses should be double cut and rolled each day.

Roll, did I say roll? If the greens still have grass this summer, then the golfers want to know if they can roll them. Yes, rollers work, the green will be faster and smoother, but what is the price? The long term effects of rolling the variety of greens that exist, sand, soil, USGA, "modified" USGA, etc., are not known. Will the surface seal over, will grain become a problem? Time will tell, but the simpler, practical problems are real and must be considered as well.

For example, faster greens have fewer hole locations, so how will concentrating the traffic into a more limited area affect the quality of turf over time? Similarly, pace of play has become a concern at many courses. Perhaps the scratch golfers can handle fast greens, but for the average golfers, 3 and 4 putts can quickly transform an enjoyable 4½-hour round of golf into a 6-hour ordeal. As the saying goes, "be

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## Peat —

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Proper selection of peat improves dependability and control of your root zone media.

It is most important for our industry to contract laboratories which use USGA standardized test methods and services which fully characterize the root zone components, including the peat. Our industry has made recent strides in the use of standard methods for organic carbon of the mix (using Walkley-Black, 1960) and ash content of the peat, but that effort is not complete.

Additional emphasis should be placed on organic carbon, particle size distribution and the quality of the peat alone. The quality of the peat fiber can be described by its biostability. The carbon:nitrogen ratio is one good indicator of biostability.

Where peat is used in topdressing or core aeration, the compatibility of these materials to those of the original root zone media is also essential. Laboratory and blending services with peat expertise help us produce superior turfgrass media consisting of quality components for lasting performance.

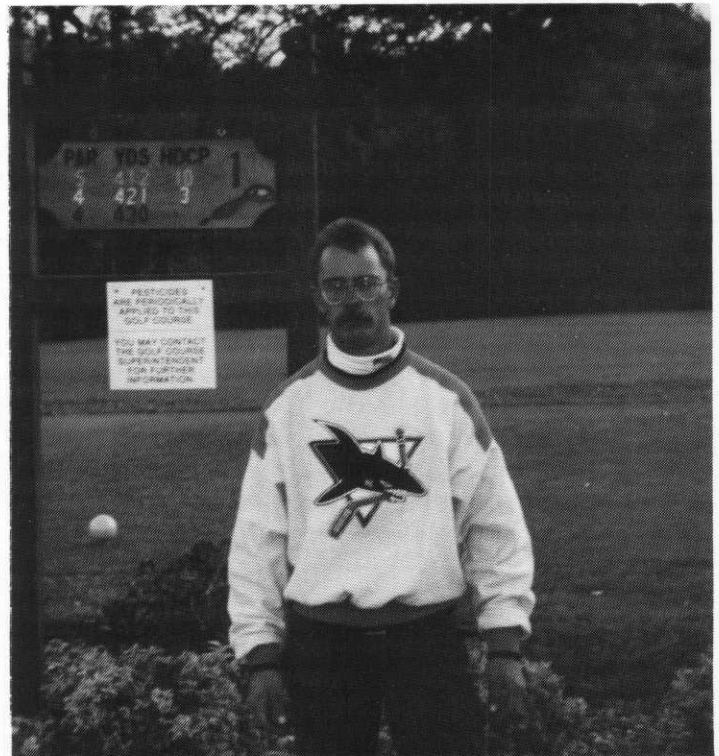
As a golf course superintendent, you may ask, "what are the benefits of being more discerning in my use of peat?"

The use of a specification peat material will ultimately result in lower costs of establishment, maintenance, renovation and general management of your turf. The peat should be consistent, compatible to the sand component in particle size distribution, and free of weed seeds, sticks and phytotoxic residues.

Through proper use of peat, you will realize some of the following benefits in your turfgrass culture and performance: improved green-up and establishment; better rooting stability and wear; reduced compactibility; improved irrigation response and control; better nutrient management; improved gas exchange; increased microbial activity and longer life for your root zone media.

The many benefits and advantages of peat warrant our careful attention to its selection and use in turfgrass culture.

—Grass Roots



Shaughn Erickson of Manitou Ridge

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careful what you wish for, because it may come true." There will always be a golfer who won't be pleased until his opponent misses that downhill putt and it rolls off the green, down the fairway and out of bounds.

I haven't given up hope because the other day a Green Committee Chairman raised this question during the visit: "Wouldn't the greens be healthier if we raised the height of cut from  $\frac{1}{8}$ " to  $\frac{1}{32}$ " but maintained the speed and smoothness by rolling a few times a week and perhaps rolling instead of mowing on Mondays?" Sometimes going the extra mile to communicate and educate pays off.



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