

" WHAT IS THATCH? " This question was asked by a club official at Sparrows Point and we will attempt to answer it by referring to and condensing a talk made by Dr. Ralph Engle before a meeting of the Northeastern Golf Course Superintendents Association.

DR. ENGLE SAYS THATCH is a tight layer of living and dead stems, roots, leaves and grasses. This layer occurs between the green grass leaves and the surface of the soil. It is called "thatch" ( indicating something undesirable ) when it begins to cause us trouble. Just how thick this accumulation can be before it becomes " thatch " - no one knows. Dr. Fred Grau calls this surface accumulation " Cushion " until it causes trouble, then it becomes " thatch ". This cover is a cushion against soil compaction, insulation against high temperatures and a reducer of moisture loss. It is certainly desirable on a putting green, but control measures should go on all the time to prevent excessive build-up. The troubles associated with thatch lead to ~~many~~ evils but seldom produces a single simple result that kills all 18 greens at one time. As the thatch layer accumulates on the surface less oxygen reaches the roots which means a shallower root system. If water isn't moving into the thatch and on through it into the soil carrying in the oxygen it should it is not forcing out the CO<sub>2</sub> and in turn pulling in oxygen laden air behind. Also, if water does not enter the soil neither can the normal supply of nitrogen, calcium, phosphorus and potash, since these plant feed elements have to be in liquid form before they can be taken up by the roots.

THATCH ALSO CAUSES insect and disease problems. If water can't penetrate the thatch ( used for house roofs in the South Pacific ) the insecticides slide off the surface and don't move down deep enough to get destructive insects. Thatch is an incubation area for diseases and in some cases our fungicides can't penetrate to get at the source of the trouble.

WE HAVE MORE WATER PROBLEMS where there is excessive thatch for the same reasons mentioned above - the water runs off instead of in. The root system that develops under this condition is very close to the surface and suffers terribly if water is not applied at very close intervals. But frequent watering encourages shallow roots that require more water, etc. ( If you meet someone in this vicious circle, it may be you coming back. )

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO if you have thatch ? Keep in mind that it wasn't built up over night so don't try to eliminate it in one operation. First check you Ph and lime moderately or heavily as indicated by the test. Use the mechanical means at your disposal for cutting away some of the excess surface material but use caution here. Don't remove all the green canopy. Puncture the surface with any of the aerating tools available and top dress with the thought in mind that some of the top dressing must come in contact with the soil under the thatch. Lime again if Ph is not too high and use great care watering.

FROM THE SECRETARY. The Mid-Atlantic has the right to be proud of the fact that we are in second place among the Superintendents' Association of the nation in the new National members signed up this year. Our record of 11 is exceeded only by Northern Ohio which had 14. The latest new member is Joseph G. Kaufman, associate and national, who is with American Agricultural Chemical Co.

DUES FOR THE YEAR 1961 become due October 1, 1960 , as do National dues. Mid-Atlantic lapel pins are available at \$4.00 each. Brochures of the 1959 Baltimore Turfgrass Conference can be obtained for \$4.00. - Tom Doerer, Secretary