

The Unseen Enemy

by Bill Neus

You know, it's a funny thing about golf course superintendents, when a group of them get together and start talking about turf problems they sometimes play the game of "one-upmanship." It sounds like this: You think you've got June beetle grubs? They plowed by fairway so bad I replanted corn instead of grass; or, my poa seed was so heavy and so whate that they held the Olympic cross country ski trials at my place. All of us at times believe that our job is a little tougher than the other guys, when in reality all of us get a chance, sooner or later, to deal with a worrisome, serious and difficult to handle problem. Here was mine this year.

The unseen enemy. It's nothing short of guerrilla warfare. They can strike suddenly or be slow and methodical. But you never see them. Their damage can be devastating or it can be minor. All the while you're blaming it on something else. The damage may have been going on for years but you're not sure why and you may still now know, because you've been trained not to look for them. Everyday is Halloween to these perpetrators because they always have a mask on. The symptoms appear to be something else. Covert operations in the turf. The CIA should employ them instead of Oliver North.

Nematodes! Stop laughing, it's true. They hit my greens this spring and we're not talking high sand content either. Our soil is more of the familiar parking lot consistency.

Our greens looked as good or better than I'd ever seen them until late April

when they began showing stress and minor thinning. This was diagnosed as a mild phytotoxic effect to the pre-emerge crabgrass control. Made sense to me. We all see that occasionally. We've also used light applications of Turf Cal for several years, so what little poa that was there was beginning to discolor. Again, no alarms, this was normal. Well, by mid-May, several greens are showing signs of daily wilt and the thinning problem has been a rollercoaster ride. The areas would start to fill in and then they would regress. Traffic patterns are becoming very noticeable. Now golfers are starting to ask questions and I don't have a lot of answers.

I was beginning to feel outmatched. So it was time to do two things: call Tom Turner (which was the smart thing) and it was also time for us to aerify and topdress which we normally do this time of year anyway. Of course, we all know that punching holes, topdressing and a little fertilizer does wonders, right? Not this time. Each time those aerifier tines hit the ground, my greens had to be screaming, "Oh God, please stop!" But I said, "Take your medicine, it's good for you." Did I kill them, you ask? Hell no. I wouldn't do something that dumb. I just gave it the old college try. I certainly have acquired a higher respect for the survivability of bentgrass. Now things were looking ugly, and I feel like I'm out of bullets.

Well, Dr. Turner came riding in on his white horse to save the day and my sanity. He probed, picked and crawled around on his knees for awhile and then sermonized about the lousy soil, terrible

drainage and too much traffic. He then put his hand on my shoulder and said, "let me lead you out of the darkness and into the promised land. It looks like you have nematodes my boy." Off into the sunset he rode with soil samples and his prophecy proved correct.

We immediately applied some Nema-cur and within days began seeing recovery. Other than two greens that still show battle scars, there are not visible signs of a problem.

Obviously, it wasn't a very pleasant time for me. I took my share of abuse from the golfers. Everybody becomes an expert. Even had one guy swear that I'd paid Dr. Turner to say what I wanted him to say.

So, what's the lesson here? Nematodes are a growing problem in the mid-atlantic. Hobbits Glen is not a unique case. Don't think you need high sand content for an infestation. Here's a suggestion. If you have a green or several greens that show stress easily, year after year; and, you've always said things like, "this is my problem," or "this is just a bad green." Or, maybe you rationalize an uncertain problem away by calling it bad drainage, high traffic, etc. It may be those things, but if you haven't tested for "the unseen enemy," then you haven't looked far enough.

Now that I've admitted that I couldn't see or identify the enemy, somebody is going to one-up me and say that they had nematodes so big that they could trip over them. Go ahead. I might be willing to believe it now.

Down Home Crabs, Dogs and Burgers

Summer means picnics and what a picnic we had August 12th at Bretton Woods. The crab was tender and sweet and supers and their families couldn't pick fast enough. For those who have yet to acquire a taste for tehse delicacies, the ribs, hot dogs and burgers were finger licking good.

Thanks to a marvelous clown from "Clown Capers" the kids were entertained for most of the day with face painting and a magic show. That was a great treat for moms and dads who found lots of time for catching up with old friends and making a few new ones.

A loud round of applause to Gerry Gerard and staff for another memorable picnic. Also, a vote of thanks to those who postponed their own enjoyment to stand over the hot coals and cook those ribs, burgers, and corn!



Common Greens Problems

by Steve Cohoon

The long hot summer is finally drawing to a close, and a tough one it was. The record heat took its toll on the entire course, but nowhere was it more noticeable than on the greens. Problems that were kept in control or rarely seen in the past seemed to intensify with the adverse weather conditions.

Dr. Tom Turner will be our guest speaker this month to share with us the five most common problems that have been seen on greens in the mid-atlantic region. Tom, who is with the University of Maryland, will show us what he's seen, what has caused them and hopefully, how to correct the problems. So grab your assistant and come listen to Tom. You might find out what's been wrong with that problem green.