

IMPORTANCE OF DRAINAGE ON THE GOLF COURSE

Carl Schwartzkopf
Mid-Continent Agronomist
USGA Green Section

Had you been with me in Chicago this morning listening to the Wally Phillips show, which is very similar to the J. P. McCarthy show in Detroit, you would have heard a discussion on astrology and the method the Chinese use to name the new year. Last year the Chinese New Year was the Year of the rat; this year is the Year of the Tiger. With all of the rain last year, it may have been more appropriate if it had been called the Year of the Duck!

Apparently the Chinese astrologers and zoologists made a mistake. This mistake reminds me of a story about ducks and more mistakes. An eagle sitting high on his perch got hungry one day. As he looked to the earth below he saw a dove and thought, "What a delightful meal!" So the eagle flew down, grabbed the dove in his talons and brought it back to his nest. As the eagle was getting ready to devour his catch, the dove said, "I'm a dove; let's make love." He let the dove fly away after the dove kept repeating the saying. Next the eagle saw a loon. After the eagle brought the loon back to the nest and was getting ready for lunch, the loon said, "I'm a loon; I want to spoon." So the eagle let the loon fly away as he did the dove. Next the eagle saw a duck. The eagle swept down from his perch high on the horizon, grabbed the duck and brought it back to his nest. As the eagle was going to devour the duck, the duck looked at the eagle and said, "I'm a drake; you made a mistake!"

So the Chinese made a mistake, as did the eagle. However, we can rest assured that a properly drained golf course is not a mistake. A well drained golf course comes about through proper design and correction of problems by the Golf Course Superintendent. As we look at the four factors needed for growing good, strong, healthy turf, a) sunlight, b) air drainage, c) internal soil drainage and d) surface drainage, we can see why it is important to spend time discussing this phase of turfgrass management.

In my travels throughout the Midwest this spring and early summer, many drainage problems were evident. Some of the problems were, a) a high incidence of leaf spot, b) difficulty in mowing and clippings accumulation, smothering the grass, c) poor herbicide control and d) difficulty in controlling summer diseases.

Turf loss was not excessive, although perhaps a little higher than in the past. The clubs using calcium arsenate for weed control experienced some additional problems when full consideration was not given to drainage. When the superintendents improved the drainage, they improved the playability of the golf course. (The above points were emphasized with the use of visual aids).

With the poor growing conditions many clubs have found it necessary to start renovation programs earlier in the season. The cool, wet spring was also favorable for the quantity of Poa annua seed produced.

Gathering at turfgrass conferences such as this one gives all present an opportunity to learn from each other the experiences and solutions to problems that were encountered at each respective golf course. Now to learn from the experiences of the panel, their problems and how to solve them.