

The Truth About Greenkeeping

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THE term "greenkeeping" is not among the 83,000 words that appear in my 1924 Desk Standard Dictionary. "Greenkeeper" is also lacking. "Green," according to that book, is the ordinary color of growing plants, and is also used to express something that has not arrived at perfection, is unripe or immature. It is also given as "of recent occurrence; new; fresh" and "characterized by youthful vigor; flourishing." It is used to designate a "plot of grass land."

Among the men familiar with the term "greenkeeping," the word "green" means the "plot of grass land" and the golfing population use the term to designate that area of ground on which they find "the soul of golf." It is a great word. As I look out of my office window across the country side, green is the predominating color. Nature is the Great Greenkeeper. To be a greenkeeper, as we know the term, we must be first hand students of the Great Greenkeeper.

The call that the Great Greenkeeper has made has been heard by millions. It has penetrated the office walls where thousands earn their daily bread; it has been heard above the roaring and clanging in the big industrial shops; it comes softly to the ears of professional men and women as they bend over their books, papers, or patients; children everywhere have heard the call, and men working in the depths of the ground look forward to the time when they may heed the call.

Greenkeepers, as they are known, are agents of the Great Greenkeeper. In a small way they prepare tracts of Mother Nature's garden for the golfing multitude, and then it is their premier duty to keep such tracts in proper condition for that game of games, golf.

Love of Nature First Requisite

What is the necessary characteristic of the man who elects himself to the job of greenkeeping? Perhaps it is industry, or intelligence. It might be patience, persistence, honesty, ability to study, or mechanical ability. It is all of these. But the essential characteristic is love of Nature. He may have all the other essentials, but he will fail before he has begun if he cannot love the beauty and perplexities of the Great Greenkeeper. He can never hope to be a master of Nature but he must love her and constantly seek her knowledge.

What must the man know to be a greenkeeper? If he loves Nature in all her moods, he understands that many of her moods are unfavorable to his work. Nature provides means of existence for all living things, and in so

doing she must not select a golf course for living things pertaining only to the joy of the greenkeeper and the golfer. A greenkeeper must be constantly prepared to cope with her unfavorable moods. He must encourage the desirable and discourage the undesirable. He must know how to make the best of either favorable or unfavorable conditions.

Knowledge of Climate and Soil

Knowledge of the climatic conditions in the region in which the greenkeeper is employed is imperative to his success. High and low temperatures, humidity, rainfall and winds modify his work. The duration of the seasons calls for careful planning while sudden storms, hot winds and open winters must be considered as uncertain factors.

Soils differ largely in the same locality. The greenkeeper must know how to treat a sticky, baking soil as well as a loose, sandy loam or light peat. Fertility must be considered at all times, and the chemical condition of the soil must be modified by his expert care in hundreds of instances.

Fertilization a Constant Study

More than fifty kinds of fertilizers and soil conditioners are offered to the greenkeeper by one company. Hundreds of various kinds of fertilizers are on the market, and the selection of a fertilizer is an item of golf maintenance that must be carefully considered. Elements desired, availability, duration, chemical reaction, ease in handling, odor and cost are some of the points a greenkeeper should consider. Compost top-dressing or liquid application of fertilizer are both good. When should one be applied, and when is the other superior? How much of any fertilizer should be applied?

Growing Grasses Suited to Locality

To choose a strain of bent today is as easy as choosing a make of automobile. But there is a best strain for every locality. What is it? It is reasonable to suppose that a strain of bent found very satisfactory in Minnesota might be superior to all others in California? Bent is but one type of grass. There is a place on most golf courses for the fescues, poa grasses, rye grasses and legumes. Quack grass is common in the roughs of the northwest, and Bermuda is foreign language to the native sons of Wisconsin or Vermont. The green-

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keeper must know the habits of the grasses that grow in his locality, and he must know them well.

To Seed, Sod or Stolonize?

Seeding is the common way to start grass growing. Stolonizing and sodding are other ways. When is the best time to seed? How much seed should be used? Is it clean seed and will it germinate well? How should it be planted? When should one stolonize? How is the material? Will it grow, or how much will grow? How should the stolons be applied? How do you handle sod? How thick do you cut it? Do you roll it much? How much does it cost to sod an area like that? Those are a few of the questions that every greenkeeper has been asked. Can an attorney at law answer as many questions in his line in as short a time as a greenkeeper must and will answer the questions above?

Mowing and Watering

Mowing is the job that takes more of the maintenance allowance than any other phase of golf course work. Watering is the job that calls for exact knowledge. When should mowing and watering be done? How long should grass be cut? When should greens, tees, borders and fairways be cut? When should watering be done, and how much should be applied? How do rain storms affect the greenkeepers plan of watering? How can excess water be taken from greens, fairways and traps? The good professional greenkeeper does not guess the answer to these questions, he knows.

Selecting Efficient Equipment

Some wise man made the statement that a golf club tool shop is one of the world's best concentration points for junk. Golf clubs have supplied a living to hundreds of men who are engaged in making equipment that is worth less than one-half of one per cent of its cost. One look at a tool shed is enough to know the professional efficiency of the greenkeeper in charge. He buys equipment that pays for itself. He is able to select a good mower, a good rake, a good tractor, a good team, a good harness, a good truck, a good plow, a good top dressing machine, a good flag, or any other article needed in the maintenance of a golf course. He must be a buyer; he must buy well and economically.

Maintaining Machinery in Repair

After having purchased a machine, the greenkeeper must care for it. He must understand how it functions, and how to get the most and best results with it. He must know oil from grease, he must know wear from breakage. He must have tools with which to repair any article that may break at a time when he needs it most. He must know how to use such tools. The member of a club who brings a guest from London or Tokio to play golf on Wednesday has little patience to listen to a break-

down story, even tho the breakdown was directly responsible for the long grass on the eighteenth green.

Necessary Control of Pests

Some of the friends of the greenkeeper look upon his job as one to be compared with that of the janitor of heaven. But a few words on pests will convince any skeptic that greenkeeping is not all sunshine and rosy clouds. Aside from unreasonable members and high pressure salesmen, he must combat brown patch, snow mold, worms, ants, beetles, gophers, mice, skunks, hornets, rats, rabbits, dandelions, chickweed, plantain, crabgrass, grubs and many more objects of irritation.

Training and Holding Good Workmen

After a survey of the job of keeping greens, one realizes that the best assistance a greenkeeper may have is a good crew of intelligent workmen. A workman on a golf course is as much of a tradesman as a carpenter or mason. To hire and keep such men is a big task, for golf maintenance men are usually paid on the same basis as common workmen. Fairness and personality on the greenkeeper's part are essential. He must make his men like him and like their work. In regard to his workmen, he is an employer rather than a foreman. Tact alone will carry him through many tight places in this respect.

Establishing a Greenkeeping Standard

My article touches on the job of greenkeeping. I could go on for many days and write of things that a greenkeeper ought to know. But I hope I have mentioned enough to convince anyone that a good greenkeeper is called upon to use gray matter as much as a lawyer, doctor, or dentist. Yet a greenkeeper is considered by most golfers as a workman on the grounds.

We are not considered professional men by most people. We are responsible for that condition. Any one who has charge of a golf course is a greenkeeper. Some are worthy of the name, others are not. Every professional man must meet a certain standard before he is admitted into the profession. We are admitted as soon as we get a job.

Let us raise our standards. Let us have a bar examination, so to speak, and give every greenkeeper the opportunity to pass that examination. Let such examination be approved by the Green Section of the U.S.G.A. That will give us a common standard. Let the examinations be regional, so that the test applies to Minnesota will be different than the test in Florida.

Lawyers passing the bar examination in New York are not conversant with the laws of South Dakota, but they have the same fundamental understanding of law. The same principle could apply in our profession.

Are we content to be greenkeepers as the word stands today, or shall we get busy and make the word "greenkeeping" mean something?