

Break up soil to lower thatch

FT. WORTH, Texas — An ironic aspect about thatch is that it can come about as a result of you doing your job well.

"In general, practices that promote vigor, growth and persistence in turf also promote thatch development. That's just the nature of the game," says Robert Green, research associate at Texas A&M University, College Station.

Thatch has a number of potential causes, says Green, including excessive nitrogen fertilization, poor drainage, a soil pH above 7 and the liberal use of broad-

spectrum pesticides.

"We're recommending more judicious use of specific pesticides," says Green. "As far as watering is concerned, we need to wet it, let it dry. Wet it, let it dry. That's the kind of watering that's ideal in thatch prevention."

Green also notes that everyday practices such as mowing no more than 40 percent of the turf's leaf blade and avoiding turf cultivars prone to thatch problems (such as zoysiagrass, some Bermudagrasses and St. Augustinegrass) is a good idea.

If you have a thatch problem, engage the soil just below the surface by kicking up the thatch, says Green, as is done through aerifying or slicing. However, he adds, "Aerification should not be so severe that it takes more than 10 days for the turf to recover." It's better to aerify more often and not as deep, he suggests, when the turf is experiencing its most active growth period (in warm season climates, summer; in cool, usually the fall).

Coring, described by Green as the most effective way to control thatch,



Thatch gets built up in high-maintenance turfgrass.

should introduce at least one hole per six inches of turf. Also, allow the cores to dry out before you reintroduce them into the soil. □

LAWN CARE

PLCAA starts education foundation

MARIETTA, Ga. — The Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA) recently formed the PLCAA Education and Research Foundation.

Purpose of the foundation is to enhance the public understanding of benefits of turfgrasses to the urban environment and to fund activities such as research and education to further this understanding.

The foundation's goal is to raise \$100,000 in 1989.

Members of the foundation's board are: Bruce Augustin, Ph.D., Lesco, Inc.; Paul Bizon, Pro-Grass, Inc.; Thomas Delaney, Georgia Department of Agriculture; Robert Earley, *Lawn Care Industry* magazine; Jerry Faulring, Hydro Lawn; Mary Fischer, wife of the late Bill Fischer, PLCAA past-president;

Russ Frith, Lawn Doctor, Inc.; John Hall, Ph.D., VPI-SU; Dave Hansen, Industrial Landscape Services; Walter Houston, Encap Products Co.; Paul Moore, Lawn Green, Inc.; Martin Petrovic, Ph.D., Cornell University;

Paul Schnare, Ph.D., Accu-Grow; Robert Shearman, Ph.D., University of Nebraska; Barry Troutman, Ph.D., PLCAA; Keith Weidler, past PLCAA board member; and Ruth Yursa, sister of the late Jim Marria, past PLCAA president.

Earley is group vice-president of *LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT* magazine and Hall, Petrovic and Shearman members of the magazine's Editorial Advisory Board.

One of the original ideas in forming the foundation was in part to memorialize Marria and Fischer. □

LEGISLATION

Contracts could become standard for lawn care industry

COLUMBUS, Ohio — According to Marty Erbaugh of Lawnmark, Inc., the possibility of signed contracts going to all lawn care customers may become the rule rather than the exception in the lawn care industry.

"The wave of regulations are just beginning," Erbaugh told Ohio Turfgrass Foundation members at their annual conference. "Over 50 percent of our business is in New York where the Department of Environmental Control (DEC) has proposed signed contracts for all LCOs. You just watch it trickle to Ohio



Marty Erbaugh

and Pennsylvania and most of the rest of the states."

Erbaugh said his company started to like the idea of a signed contract for all

new customers. "It may have been the best decision we've ever made," he noted.

Erbaugh said Lawnmark, which had sales of \$8 million in 1988, made 15,000 sales—all under contract—before May 15.

"Ninety-two percent of the verbal agreements converted to signed contracts," Erbaugh pointed out. "The other eight percent—well, they're better off being serviced by the other guy."

"The marketplace appreciated us spelling out the rules. It helped business because we created more realistic expectations at the

start of our relationship with the customer."

The contract Lawnmark presents new customers is divided into eight sections: Services provided, Timing of treatments, Payment terms, Guarantee, Service calls/service continuity, Other services, Continuing service and Call ahead. Erbaugh says each section is carefully worded to suit all legal responsibilities imposed by New York's DEC.

Erbaugh believes that written contracts were part of the reason for 55 percent fewer skips and cancels from new customers in 1988 than in 1987. □