

Nitrogen, growth regulators for quality Florida courses

Bermuda greens need to be well-fed," says USGA consulting agronomist John Foy, who advises superintendents in southern climates to follow at least the minimum fertility requirements for that favorite warm-season grass.

"The old rule of thumb, a pound of actual nitrogen per 1000 sq. ft. per growing month," is essential, advises Foy.

"New, high-sand rootzone greens will probably need more, but once they mature, a pound a month is reasonable. The USGA's environmental research has proven that when nitrogen is applied frequently, in lighter rates, the potential for nitrate leaching is greatly reduced."

Foy believes strongly in the value of potassium for bermudagrass greens.

"Dr. (Jerry) Sartain's work was recently published, and he's pretty adamant about a 1:1 ratio," says Foy. "I'm very adamant about at least 1:1, and in the field I see much better results with something closer to a 1:2 annual potassium fertilization program."

According to Foy, the higher potassium range results in better root growth, better general stress tolerance, heat, cold, wear, and drought tolerance.

Fairway upkeep keeps up

"Golfers not only want better greens, they also want perfect fairways," says Foy. Thankfully, equipment can help you approach perfection.

"If you had all the money in the world to be used on equipment," says Foy, "the ideal program would be to use a lightweight mower in the winter time and bring back the seven-gangs in the summertime. The lightweight mowers have great flexibility in mowing patterns, and you can do more cross-cutting and circle cutting. Gen-

erally, they have a better quality of cut, because they're hydraulically operated reels."

Foy says the drawback to using lightweight mowers on bermudagrass fairways is, ironically, their light weight.

"You need a little more weight and power to get through the bermudagrass," advises Foy, who adds that there are several good mid-weight mowers on the market.

"Ideally, you need one unit per nine holes to keep up, especially in the summertime.

Contracting verticutting

A maintenance crew can only do so much in a day. When it comes to the occasional tasks which may require leasing equipment and a significant time commitment, Foy suggests you consider subcontracting.

"A lot of people contract verticutting out, which I think is a reasonable operation," suggests Foy. "It's a once- or twice-a-year process; it's reasonable to let someone else do it for you.

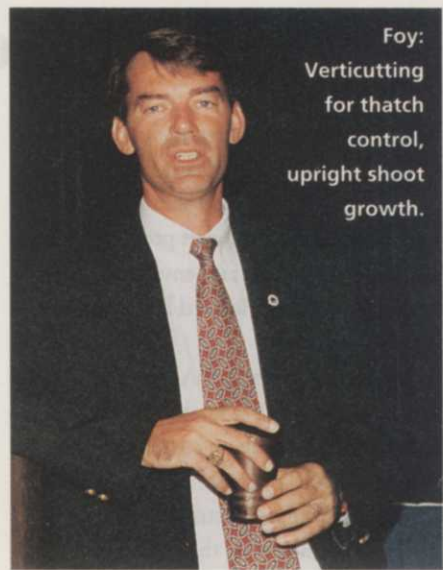
"Verticutting is an aid to thatch control," says Foy, "and a grooming aid for upright shoot growth and a good playing surface."

Foy advises lighter, more frequent verticutting—as many as three or four times during the summer growing season as opposed to once or twice—as a way to better turfgrass vigor and as a way to reduce thatch disposal problems.

Core aerifiers, topdressing

Foy says deep-tine fairway aerification of six inches is more popular nowadays as well as—providing budgets permit—topdressing fairways for thatch control.

Topdressing results in improved soil conditions and a smoother, firmer playing surface, explains Foy, who proposes top-



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dressing approaches as an added advantage to golfers whose games consist of many bump-and-run green shots.

Regulators reduce mowing

Foy is a strong supporter of growth regulators for use on golf course fairways as a way to reduce mowing frequency and bring about a "tighter" turf surface.

"A three-day mowing schedule can be cut back to one or two days per week with comparable quality," suggests Foy.

Some courses have found they can at least break even with labor costs.

Acceptable levels

"Use pesticides wisely," is Foy's key point when it comes to using control products.

"The USGA spent more than \$3 million over the last three years trying to access environmental impact of pesticides and fertilizer use," reports Foy. "When the materials are used properly, there is little or minimal impact. But, you've got to do it right. We'll never get away from [pest problems], so we've got to establish and maintain acceptable levels of pests.

"It is economically and environmentally impossible to eradicate any of these pests."

Foy spoke at the Florida Turfgrass Association trade show in Tampa in September. □