

CHIPS & PUTTS

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Sometimes it's Good to Vent

*Presented by the Golf Course Superintendents
Association of America*

It's a perfect, sunny morning and you've just reached the first green in regulation. You feel great and you know you're within birdie range. Then, you see them, those little holes in the green. Arrghh! They've just aerified the course, and it's going to ruin your round, right?

Well, maybe not. Consider the fact that PGA TOUR legend Tom Watson shot a sizzling record 58 at his then-home course, Kansas City Country Club, just days after the greens had been aerified.

Consider also that aerification is merely a short-term disruption that has long-term benefits for the course. When you see them, remember that without those little holes, the greens would eventually die.

Preventative maintenance is an integral part of successful golf course management. Golfers view aerification as an inconvenience that takes the greens out of play for a day, pulling cores from the greens and leaving holes that can affect putting for many days before healing. To add insult to injury, aerification is best done in many parts of the country during mid-summer, at the height of the playing season and when most greens are in prime condition.

But a golfer needs to understand how important aerification is to producing healthy turf. Aerification achieves three important objectives. It relieves soil compaction, it provides a method to improve the soil mixture around the highest part of a green's roots and it reduces or prevents the accumulation of excess thatch.

Like so many things, the quality of a good putting green is more than skin deep. In fact, the condition of a green has a lot to do with what goes on below the surface. In order for grass to grow at 3/16-inch, it must have deep, healthy roots. Good roots demand oxygen. In good soil, they get the oxygen from tiny pockets of air trapped between soil and sand particles.

Over time, the traffic from golfers' feet (as well as mowing equipment) tends to compact the soil under the putting green – particularly when the soil contains a lot of clay. When soil becomes compacted, the air pockets on which the roots depend are crushed, and the roots are essentially left gasping for air. Without oxygen, the grass plants become weaker and will eventually wither and die.

Aerification is a mechanical process that creates more air space in the soil and promotes deeper rooting, thus helping the grass plants stay healthy. In most cases, it's done by removing ½-inch cores (those plugs you sometimes see near a green or in fairways) from the compacted



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President's Message.....

I want to remind everyone about the upcoming S.N.O.W. meeting at Elk Mountain Ski Resort. The date is Friday, January 30, 2009. That is the day after the Northeast Show at the Woodlands. A meeting notice will be coming out in early January.

Have a Safe and Happy Holiday Season.

Darrin Larkin

Editor's Notes.....

Wow! I'm finishing up a newsletter and the president's message is already in Melinda's hands. I thought the Obama victory signaled the end of the world, but now I know things are really bad.

Christmas is upon us, a new year is just around the corner and Santa won't be bringing many budget increases in the coming year. How about we let bunkers play as hazards instead of finely manicured playing surfaces to save money? Or how about keeping the course closed after heavy rains to avoid damage to turf around greens and tees and along cart path edges where we must have at least one wheel so we can complain about the mud splashing up on our Dockers!

Yeah, this year won't be fun if the economy gets worse, but try to make the most of it. If there was ever a year when communication will be important, I would think 2009 will be it.

Hopefully, your holidays are enjoyable and safe.

Jim Gurzler



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TurfNotes

The Ohio State University



Earthworm castings are a problem on many golf course fairways in Ohio at the moment. Earthworm activity can occur anytime that cool wet weather is present but late fall is generally the worst because there is little turfgrass growth and recovery. Castings disrupt the playing surface, and the aesthetic appearance while in some cases making fairways almost unplayable by the amount of mud that can accumulate and spread through equipment and golf carts. Earthworms provide many benefits to turf systems. They are a vital factor in organic matter breakdown and decomposition, improving soil structure and drainage, and in enhancing soil fertility. Thus, earthworm control is a touchy subject because they are considered "good guys".

The earthworm, *Lumbricus terrestris*, is the major culprit that produces castings. However, other worms like the "pinworm" may cause castings on greens around the country. The photograph to the left shows earthworm casting caused by the pinworm type earthworm on a bermudagrass green in Hawaii (provided by Jon Scott). According to Lee (1985) the most critical soil properties that affect earthworm activity include food supply (organic matter, grass clippings), moisture (needed), temperature (cool), texture (greatest on light and medium loams with smaller populations on heavy clays and coarse sand), and pH (acid soils not favorable for earthworms).

If you look at these cultural practices such as clipping removal, thatch control, sand topdressing, and lowering pH might be practices to discourage casting formation. I am not sure how effective these practices are except to mention that clipping removal and thatch control would probably be of minor success, sand topdressing on fairways as a regular basis might not be practical nor proven effective. Regarding the lowering of pH, sulfur applications may help acidify the surface layer helping to discourage earthworm activity.



Some have suggested that some sort of water injection (ex. Toro Hydroject ®) would blast them and reduce the numbers. Again, I do not know how effective this would be given that *Lumbricus terrestris* tunnels fairly deeply into the soil profile. In other situations, like the one shown to the left, the symptoms or the castings are reduced on the green by poling prior to mowing



There are some products on the market that may help reduce the level of earthworm activity. Many of these products are angular shaped materials that are applied as topdressing. Research has shown that angular shaped particles agitate earthworms.

Author: Karl Danneberger published with permission from the OSU website



2009 Turf Conference and Trade Show

As you will see on page 8, Penn State will again be running the NE PA Turf Conference and Trade Show at the Woodlands Inn and Resort in Wilkes Barre. Dr. McNitt and the staff have been doing a wonderful job keeping us abreast of important updates and new information in our little corner of the state.

This year we will have Mr. Bevard of USGA with a Year-in-Review talk; Ms. Hoffman of Penn St. will talk about getting rid of unwanted chemicals through the ChemSweep program; Dr. Max will talk about putting green fertility and growth regulators and also on sand rootzones and water repellency

The PM sessions will consist of a more general fare, so you will have to choose between your likes and dislikes. In addition to your PDA updates in either session, you can hear Dr. Landschoot talk about Fertilizer issues, after Rich Buckley of Rutgers provides info on leaf feeding insects, with John Fowler rounding out the session with a discussion on the Little League World Series fields. The other session will have Dr. McNitt talking about the Pros and Cons of Synthetic Turf, Dr. Landschoot talking on Dead Grass, and Mr. Fowler speaking on reducing pesticide exposure. Both PM sessions are of interest, so maybe you should bring along your assistant and share the PM sessions.

Don't forget that after the show on Thursday, the Elk Mountain S.N.O.W. day is Friday. Call Darrin Larkin for more info or better yet, search him out at the show, tell him what a great job he is doing as president, and buy him a beer.



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soil, allowing for an infusion of air and water that brings a resurgence of growth. The spaces are then filled with sand "topdressing" that helps the soil retain air space and makes it easier for roots to grow downward.

Older greens often are constructed of soils with significant amounts of silt, clay and fine organic particles that are prone to compaction. Filling aeration holes with sand improves drainage and resists compaction. The periodic introduction of sand to a green's top layer can over time, avoid or postpone expensive rebuilding or renovation of greens.

Finally, growing of turf adds to a layer of organic matter on the surface. This layer, called thatch, is an accumulation of dead stems, leaves and roots. A little organic matter makes for a resilient green, but too much invites diseases and insects. Topdressing with sand can prevent thatch buildup, and aeration is one of the best ways to reduce an existing layer and prevent an excess of thatch from becoming established.

Other aeration techniques use machines with "tines" or knives that simply poke holes through the soil profile. A new technique even uses ultra high-pressure water that's injected through the soil profile to create small holes that relieve some compaction but heal quickly.

There are many types of aerifying machines with different attachments that address different problems in the various stages of the life of a green. So the next time you're ready to scream when the aerifiers are brought on the course, remember that a little preventative maintenance produces the best greens over the long haul. The bottom line is that aeration is a necessary practice. But before you curse the superintendent for ruining your day, just think of Tom Watson.

Sources: USGA's Green Section

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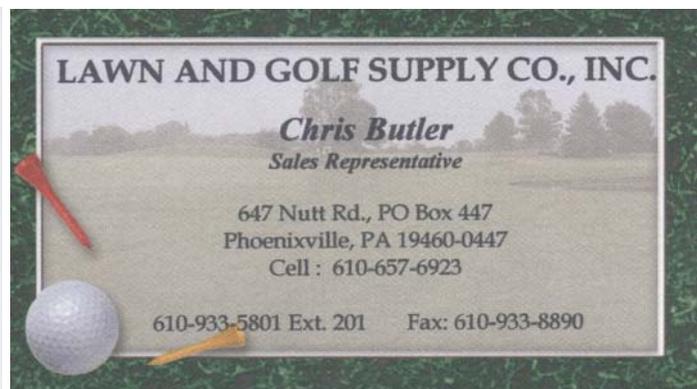
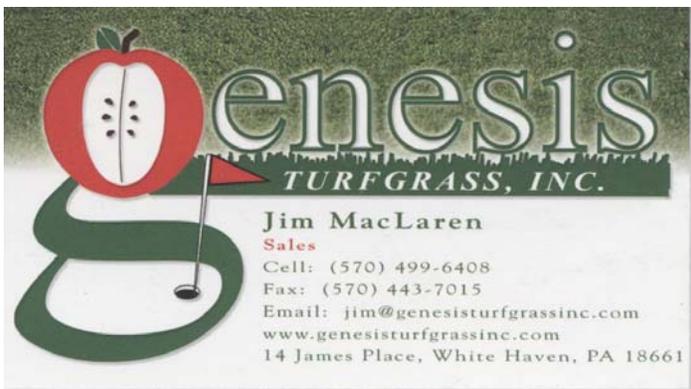
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Bailouts, Budgets, and Bounty

During the past few months of economic uncertainty and budget cuts, news of mortgage bailouts, the credit crunch, possible aid to the auto industry, and the closing of 30 of Chrysler's plants for an entire month, it is hard for anyone to focus on the bountiful provision still to be found all around us. I concede that it is difficult to be optimistic in the face of such hardships, but we must. There are still many reasons for all of us to be quite thankful. Certainly, since September 11th and the Patriot Act, we have given up some of our freedoms in the name of national security, but we still enjoy many freedoms that are simply unheard of in many other nations around the globe. We still live in a nation where we have the freedom to worship, freedom for the press to report the news, freedom for individuals to speak out against the government, freedom to have as many children as we desire, freedom to move about within our Nation to different states as we so choose, freedom to choose our life's work for ourselves, freedom for parents to choose how to educate their own children, as well as countless others. These freedoms are a valuable commodity – something to cherish and preserve, something for which we can all be thankful.

Often, the keys to the future are rooted in the past. As many history professors will attest, those who do not learn from history are destined to repeat it. Our country's past provides many insights into ways that can help all of us weather these difficult times. Most recently, we can look back to WWII and the way the Greatest Generation pulled together with their victory gardens and recycling programs. Surely we can expand our own efforts in both these areas. Shortly before that, the Great Depression taught us to "use it up, wear it out, or make it do." Tightening one's belt is never comfortable, but there are times when it is simply a necessity. As a Nation, as well as individuals, we have to learn to live within our means, not only for our own families, but for those around us. If everyone were to look to their own needs, while keeping an eye out for ways to help their neighbor, the world would soon be a better place. Did you know that around the time of the Revolutionary War, the average tax paid per family was 10% of their income? Local charitable giving was approximately equal to that amount. Today, most families give only about 2% of their income to charity. But going back even earlier in our country's history, back to nearly the beginning, when the Pilgrims first came to our shores, we learn the important lesson of self-government with voluntary union. Let's face it, no man is an island, especially in the digital age! The Pilgrims learned the hard way that socialism would not work. They nearly starved for the second time in as many years when everyone worked for the good of the community. But, when each man worked for the provision of his own family, there was suddenly an abundant harvest, with plenty to share with any who were less fortunate. These are truths for each of us to hearken to today.

So, what are the lessons to be learned from these few examples? First of all, there is always someone who is worse off than you are; so even in tough times, do not suspend your acts of charity. Secondly, as a family-man (or woman), keep your spouse first in your heart and visibly show your love to your children as you train them to take their places in society. Next, as an employee, see to it that you keep the needs, concerns of your employer uppermost in your mind and work to secure his or her success in the marketplace. Finally, as a citizen of this great nation, do your duty by supporting our Constitution and helping out wherever you see a need in your own neighborhood. As you serve your family, employer, and nation in these ways, you too will navigate the bailouts and budgets to see your way through to the bounty such times can offer.



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Holiday Football TV Schedule

Papa Johns Bowl
Rutgers Vs NC State Dec 29 3PM ESPN

Rose Bowl
Penn St. Vs USC Jan 1 4PM ABC

International Bowl
Connecticut vs Buffalo Jan 3 12PM ESPN2
(For you Dr. K, Welcome back to Penn ST.)

Totitos Fiesta Bowl
Ohio St Vs Texas Jan 5 8PM Fox

BCS Championship Game
Oklahoma Vs Florida Jan 8 8PM Fox

PTGA MEETING SCHEDULE

Want to host a meeting in 2009? Contact a board member and express your interest and what month you would like.

Eastern PA Turfgrass Conference and Show
Valley Forge, PA January 6-9, 2009

Northeast PA Show January 29, 2009
The Woodlands Wilkes Barre, PA
turf.cas.psu.edu/northeast_conference.cfm

S.n.o.w. Meeting Elk Mountain 10AM til ?
Contact Darrin Larkin for more info.

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