UNITED STATES GOLF ASSOCIATION
GREEN SECTION
WESTERN OFFICE

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THE LITTLE THINGS THAT COUNT

Good Grooming is Important

There are those who will say: Aesthetic factors have no bearing on play of the game. We frequently hear stories of players who paint their golf balls red when snow is on the ground, and we know of remote areas throughout the world where severe handicaps like thundering herds of hippopotomi, and weird birds who mistake golf balls for eggs that have strayed from the nest, must be overcome before the foursome ever reaches the 19th hole. Some would say, facetiously, no doubt, that a rabid golfer would play barefoot on cacti if the thorns could be managed into an acceptable playing surface.

Admittedly, one doesn't play on color alone, and greenness or the lack thereof should not unduly influence control of a properly made shot on a good stand of turf. In carrying this reasoning one step farther, we could also say that litter, dirty ball washer towels, unkempt lawn areas, ragged grass growth at the immediate base of trees, decaying piles of green clippings and other miscellaneous items in the realm of good grooming are completely unimportant in their bearing on play of the game. This may be true for a chap like Ben Hogan whose power of concentration is credited with eliminating all outside distractions. However, it would be our guess that the vast majority of golfers either consciously or subconsciously find good grooming affects the way they play.

We visit many courses where unjustifiable complaints have been registered concerning turf quality in relation to the game. Most of these complaints are tossed off as being caused by the loss of a close match. Who knows? Perhaps the missed putt on #18 was caused by a lack of grooming on #1 tee rather than imagined grain or an old aeration hole. We do know that at courses where good grooming is standard practice, the superintendent has less trouble from golfer complaints. Thus, we are inclined to believe that good grooming deserves every consideration, even though it may entail an additional expenditure of funds. By giving the golfer an enjoyable vista where he "shakes hands with the course", one can eliminate half of his complaints before he reaches in his bag for a club.

Are We Missing a Bet on Color?

According to William Penn Mott, Superintendent, Oakland Park Department, Oakland, California, in a recent address to the Northern California Golf Course Superintendent's Association, many of our Western golf courses indeed are "missing a bet" in their failure to appreciate and properly utilize mass displays of colorful flowering shrubs and trees. Bill likens color to grooming in its noticeable tendency to reduce player complaints. He further pointed out that recent developments in the nursery trade are being overlooked in favor of old standbys that may have outlived their usefulness.

Naturally, green is our favorite color. However, we are inclined to agree with Bill that reds, whites and pinks can set our grass colors off to better advantage. In this day of increasing play from women golfers, considerably more emphasis needs to be placed on course beautification. Local nurserymen, landscape contractors, landscape architects and university scientists are your best sources of information regarding new and improved varieties of flowering shrubs and trees that will please the men as well as the women. In the words of Mr. Mott, "the important point to remember is that the large scale we deal with on golf courses does not lend itself to single specimen plantings. The big mass display of color (50 or more flowering trees or shrubs in a single grouping) is needed to be a real eye catcher.

TURF IN THE FIELD

Gophers are Gourmets -- Northern California

Ellis Van Gorder, Superintendent, Stanford Golf Course, and USGA Green Section Committee Member, believes that preparing a tasty morsel for gopher bait has considerable merit over more convential methods of controlling this pest. Van has taken the trouble to capture live gophers for his experimentations, and finds these vegetarians are as finicky as epicures concerning what they eat and how it is prepared. Van's favorite recipe with guaranteed extermination results under Stanford conditions is:

"Take one medium sized crisp lettuce leaf and garnish with zinc phosphide powder. Place in hole, or preferably in a fresh run. Gopher does the rest. Other choice morsels in season would be milkweed, fillaree, or leaves of the tree mallow".

USGA Research Support May Lead to Rust Control -- Northern California

Dorman C. Sumner, Agronomist, University of California at Davis, reports that Phygon-XL adequately controlled a bad attack of rust on his Merion bluegrass seed production trials this Spring. The work was a pilot test comparing Phygon-XL with other fungicides used by our golf courses to control major turf diseases. It will be of interest to many of our Western courses now working with Merion bluegrass because quite a few of them have had trouble with rust disease during wet weather. Our standard turf fungicides have failed to give proper control of this pest.

Phygon-XL is a dichloro naphthoquinone commonly used as a seed treatment to prevent disease from soil organisms. It is produced by the Naugatuck Chemical Division of the United States Rubber Company. The material is suggested for limited trial until research provides us with more complete detail on its effectiveness and limitations.

It is interesting to note that a lead of this type comes from USGA Green Section sponsored work to investigate the seed production requirements of Merion bluegrass. Often our member clubs wonder why we do not confine all of our support to studies directly related to management of turf on golf courses. By so doing, the Green Section would limit its usefulness to its member clubs. Most experiment stations cannot confine their investigations to benefit only golf. We must always remember that today's research on castor beans may ultimately benefit golf.

It is for these reasons that our member clubs need the USGA Green Section to coordinate and correlate research investigations in all scientific fields. Only an unbiased, non-profit, nation-wide agency devoted solely to helping its member clubs with their turfgrass problems can accomplish this end.

CAN OUR EYES DECEIVE US?

It is human nature personified to blame or credit the last thing we do as being responsible for success, or conversely, abject failure. Thus, in trying new materials and tools, and even in relying on old standbys in our turf management work, we may be inclined to "jump the gun" in deciding that the use of "X chemical" or "X tool" resulted in marked stimulation, or complete loss of the turf. Because our human tendencies are so inclined, recognized research agencies treat their work statistically to eliminate the chance of human error. Plot work is randomized and replicated, and the accumulated data are treated mathematically. It is only through such an objective approach that we really know whether one grass, as an example, is significantly better than another under a given set of conditions.

In the past three years tremendous interest has been aroused in the use of soil conditioners to stabilize soil structure. Nurserymen, farmers and some superintendents believe in them thoroughly, and a few scientists have reported that they show considerable promise for certain soils and crops. Some of the answers to their future use on golf courses depends on (1) effectiveness in promoting early and vigorous seedlings, (2) effectiveness in alleviating soil compaction following turf establishment, and (3) relative cost in comparison with the use of organic matter and amendments which are used to accomplish the same results.

In the light of our present knowledge, we can say that the relative cost is high, and that we have insufficient information to know whether or not they will stabilize structure under constant heavy foot traffic where moisture is maintained at or near field capacity. It is with relation to effectiveness in promoting a better stand of grass that "our eyes deceived us". In one experiment on a clay soil our eyes told us that conditioner treated plots were far superior to no treatment or the use of a straw mulch. Had we depended on observation alone we would have been guilty of jumping to erroneous conclusions. Statistically treated data showed that (1) both conditioner and straw mulch plots were significantly better than the no treatment, (2) conditioner and straw mulch plots germinated at the same time, and (3) after initial establishment, the seedlings under straw mulch were twice as tall as on the conditioner treated plots.

In this instance our eyes deceived us because the mulch was unsightly in appearance; it masked the additional growth of the seedlings; and it hid from view, although still protected, surface structure. Thus, before condemning or endorsing a product one must make certain that his conclusions are justified.

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