

TURF TWISTERS

A DIFFERENT WORLD

Question: How do you increase the thatch layer in putting greens on a heavily played public golf course? (New York)

Answer: Public golf course maintenance is in a different world from country club maintenance. We agree that thatch is very difficult to produce on heavily played greens. Our recommendations are: (1) enlarge green size if at all possible to spread traffic; (2) utilize every square foot of practical pin space; (3) encourage bentgrass through management and overseeding; (4) thoroughly aerate all greens three to five times yearly (the new roots formed will help provide added resiliency); (5) use the upper safe limits when applying nitrogen; (6) topdress on a light, frequent schedule with quality material to provide new soil life and a new growing medium for existent grasses; and (7) close the course during inclement weather when traffic could be especially harmful to putting soils and surfaces.

WITH BUILT-IN SAFETY

Question: When troubled with a difficult-to-control disease, is it advisable to increase the rate of application of fungicide recommended? (California)

Answer: THE ANSWER IS A RESOUNDING NO! For most fungicides, manufacturers build in a safety factor of two times the normal application rate. This, they emphasize, is to compensate for possible human error. Therefore, when applied at two times the recommended rate *no injury should occur to the plant*. But what about soil organisms? What about target (pathogenic) vs. non-target (non-pathogenic) organisms? Will the double rate upset their natural balance? THE ANSWER IS YES. If you encounter serious disease problems annually, examine your total management program first. Fungicides are helpful adjuncts to management and never should be relied upon as the mainstream program.

WILL TAKE AN ACT OF CONGRESS

Question: We are told that it is helpful to raise the height of cut on putting greens during periods of heat stress in summer. What is your recommendation? (Connecticut)

Answer: For normal country club play, once your mower is set at a height desired by your membership . . . change it only by Act of Congress! If your grass continually becomes weakened in July and August, carefully examine and adjust your nitrogen rate, not the mower height! Raising the mower height causes more thatch buildup, increases the need for more aeration and vertical mowing, increases disease potential because of increased leaf mass, produces more grain in greens, increases leaf length, and therefore slows the pace of green speed and causes surfaces that are less than true to putt on, to say nothing of the perennial problem some golfers suffer on untrue surfaces — the dreaded Yips!

For courses that experience heavy play on greens, there is justification for raising the mower because the added leaf surface and resultant thatch increase should help decrease the rate of injury from traffic wear. In doing so, however, we recommend that the mower be raised in increments of 1/32 inch until a height that you can live with is determined. Rarely, if ever, should greens be mowed over a true 1/4 inch.