

ALL THINGS CONSIDERED

Why Are Golf Courses Used As Proving Grounds?

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THREE GREAT hazards to the job permanence of golf course superintendents are turf field days, product demonstrations, and commercially sponsored research reports. They are usually long on promise and short on permanence. Innovative *features* seem to have replaced effective performance as criteria for evaluating products and procedures. In their haste to produce or publish, both manufacturers and researchers are enticing golf course superintendents to use their courses and money as proving grounds for flashy machines, new but untested cultivars, exotic chemical formulations, or procedures based only on educated guesses. This is not new, but it is a great deal more expensive now than it has been in the past, and it may be straining the professional status of the superintendents as they are seen by their executive officers.

Field days and demonstrations are the media events of the turf world. We are titillated by prototype equipment touted as being second only to perpetual motion and crammed with *features*. *Features* made Edsels appealing. *Features* are the forerunners of the "Oops Kits" inevitably received by purchasers of *Breakthrough Equipment*.

Those well-manicured plots at field days are in the same category, since we seldom learn the maintenance level of the test area before or after the grooming for show and tell. How bad was "moderate discoloration and thinning of the turf"

after chemical treatment, and for how long? How much thatch develops under that beautiful new cultivar? Where did the air in that punched aeration hole come from if a core was not removed? Research of this type requires more than a season or two, and even though progress reports do include disclaimers, they are not strongly stated.

The credibility gap can be closed only by golf course superintendents who ask pointed questions about products and procedures that affect their own credibility with the principals of their organization.

It should not be an affront to ask for performance data on equipment. It should not be an embarrassment to ask who sponsored the research on Miracle products, and the conditions of the test. (It is doubtful that any company-sponsored product has ever been reported to be a total bust.) It should not be out of line to question the methods of research when short-term results are contrary to established principles.

Meeting the challenge of golf turf management today should be enough adventure for anyone. No shortcuts to perfection have withstood the test of time thus far, so it is unlikely this year's Startling Technological Breakthrough will. Field days and demonstrations should be enjoyed like a picnic, and progress reports, like potato chips, should be taken with a grain or two of salt.

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