

The First Turf Garden in America

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The illustration gives a view of the Olcott turf garden at South Manchester, Connecticut, as it appeared about 1910, after the originator, Mr. J. B. Olcott, had been at work studying turf grasses for twenty-five years. As early as 1885, long before the development of American golf, Olcott conceived the idea that greenswards could be developed of as fine quality as the exquisite small patches of turf that can be found in nearly every lawn. He began by selecting the best mats of turf he could find and multiplying them by vegetative methods until he had enough to plant small plots. Olcott was strongly prejudiced against the use of seeds, as he believed that seeds produced a more or less mongrel lot of grasses. Therefore all his work, from first to last, was by vegetative methods. After the work was fairly developed, he was assisted in its prosecution by the Connecticut Experiment Station.

During his work Olcott selected many hundreds of mats of turf, but he promptly discarded all that did not appeal to him. In the course of his work he traveled in Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and from every place he went he chose a bit of turf. When I first saw the garden, in 1910, the great majority of the plots consisted of strains of red fescue, but a few were of bents. One of his red fescues was especially beautiful, and the plot of this was large; besides he made from it the lawn about his house. This turf was purchased by the late Fred W. Tayler and transferred bodily to his home at Highland, near Philadelphia. It made an exquisite lawn in fall and spring, but in midsummer was badly attacked by "brown patch." Indeed, its susceptibility to this disease is its only fault.

Olcott, like many another pioneer, was ahead of his time. Few recognized the significance of his work, as at that time there did not exist the great body of golfers who have learned to appreciate really fine turf. The method he used is, however, the correct one to select the best strains of fine grasses. As applied to such grasses as creeping bent, velvet bent, Bermuda grass, and even red fescue, the method is simple and not expensive. By its means putting greens of superlative quality can be secured. It is safe to predict that in the very near future the best golf courses will plant their greens by the vegetative method, which will insure perfectly uniform turf of the highest quality. While Olcott's work did not lead to this modern development, it must be conceded that he clearly recognized the true way in which to secure perfection in turf.

Experience and Experiments

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When the methods on any golf course give satisfactory results as indicated by general excellence of the greens, the methods command respect. On many golf courses, however, the methods used are very complicated and it is practically impossible to determine which treatments or processes are really effective. Thus if the putting greens are treated at various times during the season with diverse substances such as lime, muck, manure and nitrate of soda, no one can say just what are the effects of each, even though the end result be highly satisfactory. Indeed some of the treatments may be truly harmful but their effects are masked by other treatments that are beneficial.

Herein lies the value of an experiment, in which treatment with a single substance or with an implement say for one-half of a green is compared with the other half left untouched. Only by this method is it possible to ascertain whether a particular substance or process is desirable or unsatisfactory. Such simple experiments are particularly valuable to reach correct conclusions. Indeed there is no other method nearly as good.

Stones in the Fairway

If fairways are at all stony the best time of the year to remove them is early spring, just as the frost leaves the ground and before the grass starts to grow. When stones are removed at this time practically all the holes are smoothed out by rolling. Fairways need this rolling every spring to compact the loose surface soil caused by freezing and thawing.

Burning the Rough

The question is often asked, Should the rough be burned? There are different opinions on this subject. It is quite generally agreed, however, that burning improves the rough, especially if there is a large accumulation of coarse dead material or if there is an invasion of shrubby plants. Generally speaking, it is quite probable that burning at least once in two years is helpful.

Make New Holes Frequently in Spring

In early spring, if the soil on the putting green is at all soggy, the hole should be changed frequently. If this is not done the continuous trampling about the hole is very hard on the turf. Sanding helps to protect the soil from too great compaction with consequent injury to the grass.

Drainage

Early spring is a good time to determine which greens are most in need of drainage. The soil becomes in good condition first on the well drained greens and remains soggy longest on those poorly drained. Drainage is never adequate if a soggy condition remains more than a day or two in good weather.

Earthworms.

Earthworms begin to be active with the first warm days in spring just as soon as the earliest grasses take on a live green color. The number of the casts is a good index to their abundance. If they are numerous the green should be wormed just as soon as the soil is fairly dry so the poison will go down into their holes. It is inadvisable to treat the green while the soil is still full of water.