

Top-Dressing Creeping Bent Putting Greens With Compost

By O. B. Fitts

The importance of top-dressing, to the maintenance of ideal putting greens, is in many cases underestimated to such an extent that numerous mistakes occur resulting in undesirable conditions of the turf. Some make the mistake of not top-dressing at all. Others make the mistake of top-dressing with seed when they should use compost, or sand alone, as may be needed. Still others top-dress in a haphazard way, with little idea of why they are doing it; some one suggested that the greens needed top-dressing, so they got busy and top-dressed them; what they used or how they used it was apparently of little importance, just so long as they top-dressed. Haphazard top-dressing is a mistake; it may by chance give the desired results; but why take the chance? It will more often be wrong, and the results will be bad. Then we find those who do the thing right; they employ the proper methods and get the desired results. The purpose of this article is briefly to discuss the proper methods of top-dressing, particularly the methods which have been found, during the course of experimenting at the Arlington Experimental Farm, to give the best results on a heavy clay soil under conditions existing there.

MATERIALS TO USE.—Owing to the fact that the composition of the soils of different greens varies, it is necessary that the composition of the materials used for top-dressing should vary accordingly. The proportions of the ingredients to be used should be governed by the composition of the soil of the green. The three principal materials generally used in compost are loam or clay loam, manure or similar organic matter, and sand. On clay soil, sand should be included very liberally. On sandy soil, loam or clay loam should preponderate. If the soil is poor and contains little organic matter, manure should be used freely. On medium loam soil, a mixture of equal parts of manure, loam, and sand should be used. For spring or fall application, the top-dressing material (compost) should be mixed thoroughly with enough ammonium sulfate so that an application of the latter may be made at the rate of 3 pounds to 1,000 square feet, and during hot weather at the rate of 1 to 1½ pounds to 1,000 square feet.

RATE OF APPLICATION.—Experience has indicated that light and frequent applications of compost give best results. One to 1½ cubic yards to the green is ample; that is, at the rate of 1 cubic yard to 5,000 square feet of surface. When applied at this rate, spread uniformly over the surface, and then well brushed in, it will not interfere with play, whereas heavier applications make the surface undesirable for putting for several days. The light application does not cover the grass or temporarily check its growth. Compost should be worked down around the base of the grass plants, leaving the growing shoots exposed and thereby encouraging the growth of the grass and not retarding it. Heavy applications cover the leaves in spots, causing a mottled, displeasing appearance both in the variation of growth and in the color of the grass. It is difficult to determine by any measurable depth of covering, just what quantity is best. In fact, the quantity which gives best results as above suggested is hardly of a measurable depth when spread uniformly over the surface, as it should be spread. One-fourth to ½-inch has been recommended at times as an advisable covering; but in experiments at Arlington and elsewhere it has been observed that even ¼-inch or thereabouts has not given as satisfactory results as 1 cubic yard to 5,000 square feet of surface.

FREQUENCY OF APPLICATION.—An application of compost as here suggested is sufficient to keep the surface of the green in good condition for from three to six weeks, according to the amount of play given it. It will also furnish the necessary plant food for the grass. For best results, compost should be applied at intervals of 30 to 40 days throughout the growing season. Also an application may be made advantageously during the winter when desired, as was demonstrated at Arlington last winter on several plats. The winter dressing should be applied late in January or in February for best results; this will bring the grass out in fine condition early in the spring. A disadvantage resulting from long periods between times of top-dressing, is that the surface of the green becomes packed and hard owing to the constant trampling, which makes it not only difficult for the water to penetrate but also makes it too hard for a good putting surface. Greens are frequently found in this condition, and various methods, such as spiking, reseeding, and others are used to overcome the trouble, but without success.

Top-dressing with good compost prolongs the life of turf and assists in maintaining a perfect putting surface. Greens can not be maintained properly without it.

Instructive Golf Holes VIII

No. 3, Pine Valley Golf Club, Clementon, New Jersey

An extremely impressive hole 184 yards in length, the tee being about 30 feet higher than the green, the way being an easy down-grade. The approach and putting sward together are nearly an island surrounded by fearsome-looking bunkers. The whole way from the tee to the island of turf is rough composed of a stiff-leaved sedge and scattered blueberry bushes. It requires an accurate shot to reach and hold the green; otherwise the second shot is probably from a bunker. The surroundings are very beautiful, as the illustrations show, and the golfer who makes the hole in par 3 may well feel elated. The putting sward measures 8,500 square feet.

