

The Error of Generalizing

It seems to be a habit of the human mind to generalize. Even this in a way is a generalization. Man makes a few observations, then a few correlations, and then concludes at once that he has discovered a law. The philosopher is eternally blanketing all individuals and races under specific attributes. The Psalmist reflects, "I said in my haste, 'All men are liars.'" And the wag logician suggests that if all men are liars then the Psalmist must be a liar, and therefore all men are not liars. Philosophers and poet philosophers may be forgiven for their willy-nilly indulgence in generalities. They do little harm. "All flesh is grass" is a beautiful conception, and as a matter of fact is not far from the technical truth, but when generalizing is taken into the realm of natural sciences—specifically biology, or the science of living things—it becomes a bad habit.

In plant culture we meet with generalities every day, such for example as "plants will not grow in water-logged soils" and "soils must be aerated to produce the best growth of plants." Yet we know that rice and cypress trees grow in swamps and that these soils are not aerated in the commonly accepted sense of the term. It is true many plants require well-drained soils for their best growth; but all plants do not—some plants will not even live in them. "Plants thrive best in a sweet soil," say many would-be teachers. True enough, red clover and alfalfa do. But how about blueberries and rhododendrons?

Generalizing has invaded our own pet field—turf culture. Because turf lives indefinitely we have generalized that the grass that makes it is a true perennial, such as is an oak tree or an alfalfa plant, and have predicated our methods of culture upon this erroneous conclusion. Nothing is more fallacious than the all-too-commonly accepted view that once the roots of the grass become established deeply in the soil the success of the turf is assured. It has resulted in extravagant waste of money and much bitter disappointment.

A meadow and a putting green are distinctly different in their fertilizer requirements, but they have commonly been classed together in this respect. In the case of the latter, not only growth of grass but texture of turf and freedom from weeds must be considered.

Lime is still regarded by many as the panacea for soil and plant troubles, but we know that in the culture of the bents and fescues, at least, it has little or no place. "Greens should be rolled frequently," says one. "They should be rolled only occasionally," says another. One generalizes from sandy soils; the other from clay. Close cutting of greens is advised by one as necessary for good turf. It is condemned by another as harmful to the grass. One has bent grass in mind, the other fescue. Both would be right if each would name his grass, or, in other words, if they would be specific, but failing to be specific, both are wrong. And thus we find it throughout greenkeeping. What is sauce for the goose is not necessarily sauce for the gander, particularly if the male bird be of a different species.

Generalizations to which there are important exceptions can not be excused on the ground that the exceptions prove the rule; for just as this expression, as at present worded, is a perversion of the original meaning, so is its present meaning a perversion of the truth. Rules are laws, and laws are facts immutable. If we must generalize let us be careful to note the exceptions, if any, or at least to indicate their existence. We

should practice the habit of scientific thinking, which avoids generalities, except as they come through the proper steps of hypothesis, theory, and finally law. We should understand that reasoning by analogy does not necessarily end with license to generalize. Furthermore, we should practice the strict definition and use of terms. Where possible, relative terms should be avoided. Too frequently they confuse rather than enlighten. If we do not have exact expressions to convey our thoughts we should start at once to develop them so that those who hear or read our words of wisdom may know just what we mean.

Early Morning Watering As An Aid to Brown-Patch Control

By O. B. Fitts

There is much to be said on the subject of watering putting greens. There is investigational work still to be conducted before the practice of watering can be put on a thoroughly sound basis. But what it is desired to do at this time is only to offer some suggestions regarding the relation of watering to the control of brown-patch. By brown-patch, in this article, is meant specifically the large brown-patch. The suggestions here made may also apply to the control of the small brown-patch, but the evidence accumulated is not so definite on this point.

In 1923 experiments were conducted at Arlington Farm on the effect of early morning watering on the control of brown-patch. While the experiments are still in progress it can scarcely be said that they are of sufficiently long duration or sufficiently extensive to do more than offer a hopeful suggestion. To be brief and to the point, the results at Arlington and on the greens of the East Potomac Park Public Golf Course, Washington, indicate that, in the latitude of Washington, D. C., watering in the morning before 7:30 o'clock is very helpful in the control of the large brown-patch. It does not prevent the disease, but it seems to lessen its effect appreciably, so that recovery after an attack is relatively rapid when the usual good treatment is given.

In the tests at Arlington no attempt has been made to measure the quantity of water applied, but the application may be regarded as liberal. The use of an adjustable nozzle, which will give considerably more force to the spray than the rose nozzle, is regarded as more effective. Care should be taken, however, not to apply sufficient force to disturb the surface of the green appreciably or wash the soil from around the crowns of the plants. It is suggested that this method of watering be followed, especially at times when brown-patch is likely to be active. While it is not recommended as a sure means of control under all conditions, no harm can come from giving it a thorough test, and it is thought that very beneficial results will follow.

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