Write It Down

Using a master calendar to be prepared.

BY KEITH HAPP AND DARIN BEVARD

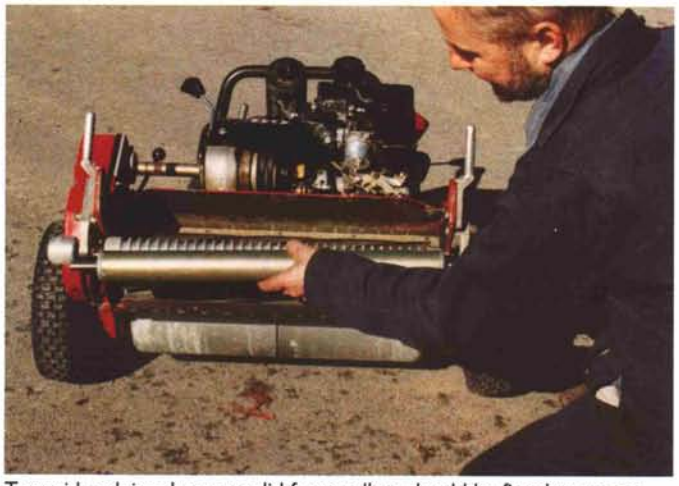
Each growing season is a learning experience, and some are more trying and difficult than others. Weather patterns may have been more punishing, or a rash of equipment breakdowns may have contributed to deteriorating turf quality. After a difficult year it is wise to reflect on programs that worked and those that did not. If mistakes were made, learn from them. Make every attempt not to repeat the past. All turf managers have the best intentions for the upcoming season, but it may take more than just good intentions. Consider immediately documenting the good, bad, and the ugly as you progress through the season. It will pay off as you prepare for the following year.

Many golf course maintenance programs are time sensitive, and they recur on an annual basis. This presents a specific window of opportunity to proactively control problems such as white grub populations, annual weed grasses, *Poa annua* seedhead development, and turfgrass diseases. Controlling snow mold (Microdochium patch), for example, is dependent on timely fungicide treatment at the same time each season. The simple fact is that many critical maintenance and preparation programs must be scheduled around other equally important programs, with the main goal of producing the best possible playing conditions for the golfers.

A good example of this is the desire to suppress *Poa annua* seedheads at a time when the core cultivation of the putting greens needs to be completed. Growth regulation for seedhead suppression and speedy recovery from core aeration simply do not mix. With effective scheduling, though, *Poa annua* seedhead suppression can be performed in close proximity to core aeration practices and positive results regarding playability can be expected. University researchers have examined these practices and have demonstrated that satisfactory recovery can be promoted even when both are implemented. Healthy turf can be produced and excellent playability can be offered.

Another example is pre-emergent weed control. Mistiming the application by as little as 7 to 10 days can lead to

An annual wall calendar can be an excellent tool for planning upcoming maintenance programs. The visibility of a wall calendar allows more staff members to see what needs to be done and take ownership of planning or implementing a particular task.



To avoid scalping damage, solid front rollers should be fitted to greens mowing equipment well in advance of conditions that could result in mechanical damage.

Weather is an uncontrollable variable associated with maintaining quality golf course turf. Document when weather conditions cause localized dry problems on the greens.

control failure. A significant investment is wasted, additional measures for post-emergent control must be implemented, and often the superintendent must answer to course officials because of visible weeds. Timing is critical!

To help plan for the season ahead and allow all recurring programs to be placed on a master schematic, purchase a master calendar. This purchase should take place well in advance of the end of the current year, providing the opportunity to place many recurring maintenance strategies on the calendar while they are fresh in your mind. Something as simple as a large annual wall calendar or a computer program will work very well.

Other examples of things that can be marked on the calendar are the first appearance of a specific disease problem, when a phenotypic indicator bloom triggered the need for insect control strategies, and when the change from grooved to solid front rollers on greens mowing equipment was needed. Naturally, notations of significant weather history also can be documented. This will aid in utilizing proactive procedures during the season ahead. It may also help minimize the number of times the words "I wish I wouldn't (or would) have done that" are uttered during the season.

Do not rely on memory to recall what worked well and what did not. A master calendar allows project, program, or task results to be posted immediately. Following is a list of suggestions that can be included as regular postings on the master calendar of management practices:

- The date when a new calendar will be purchased for the next year.
- The last heavy frost of the spring.
- The first hard frost in the fall.
- The first mowing of the greens.
- The first topdressing.
- When the soil temperature reached 55°F.
- When isolated dry spot problems developed.
- The date the first hand watering was necessary.
- When pest control measures were implemented for greens, tees, and fairways.
- When front rollers were switched on mowing equipment for greens and collars.
- The date weather conditions mandated that mowing heights be increased.
- The date solid rollers were fit to the front of fairway mowers to manage the outside edge of the fairways.
- Delivery dates for topdressing.
- Aeration treatments.
- First growth regulator treatment.
- First disease outbreak.
- Soil samples collected and submitted for analysis.
- Fertility applications.
- Turf conferences and educational opportunities.

Turfgrass management is a dynamic business. While planning is essential, no program or series of programs is set in stone. Some flexibility regarding implementation is needed; there should be some degree of wiggle room. Programs posted on the calendar of events should not be positioned on the absolute "drop dead" date.

While this tip may seem simplistic, observations from our travels and visitations in the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast Regions offer evidence that those who plan in this manner are the exception rather than the rule. Do not try to forget a bad year. Rather, use it as a learning experience and don't repeat the mistakes. All turf managers are looking for the best tools to produce the desired turf conditions at their facilities. A calendar is an effective tool to plan efficient and timely course maintenance activities.

KEITH HAPP *is a senior agronomist for the Green Section's Mid-Atlantic Region.*
DARIN BEVARD *is an agronomist working out of the Glen Mills, Pa., office of the Mid-Atlantic Region.*