

All change, Spring is coming!

This winter has been a very strange one, weather wise!

I am told that we have had over one metre (1000 mm) of rain in just 6 months. That is against the normal yearly average of 935 mm and in the first two months of 2020 we had around 276 mm! It has not been easy to deal with but on the positive side we have not had any prolonged spells of cold weather to drop the soil temperature of your green below the magical 7 degrees C. Why magical? Well, below 7 degrees C most of the soil life stops or severely slows down (including the pesky worms) but this year, growth has continued all winter long. I have been mowing, on average, once a week but now that we are heading quickly into spring my work pattern will change into full summer mode!

- Spiking/Aeration. Half inch tines are now replaced by 4 mm tines. These so-called micro tines are less invasive to bowlers.
- Fertiliser. Towards the end of last season I trialled an organic composted fertiliser and was impressed with the results. So, I will start within the next couple of weeks with very regular micro applications. When I purchase any bag of fertiliser it will state a recommended application rate and frequency. The rates for this one are 35 grammes/square metre and every 5-6 weeks. That would work out applying 2¹/₂ bags every 5-6 weeks. I know, in practice, that this fertiliser will not have an effect after 4 weeks and so I will be making a light, half bag, application every two weeks. This is how I trialled it last year and I have high hopes for this organic approach. Also, this fertiliser has been reported to help with Dollar Spot prevention and so that will be interesting to see how we fare with disease in general.
- Mowing. I've had my mower serviced by a local golf club and am really impressed with the results. In previous seasons, I have mown your green on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. I have been in touch with several quality golf course head green-keepers and will be trying a different regime this year. The fashion is to mow every other day and roll on the other days. They report that this gives a better surface with improved agronomic benefits. So, I am proposing to mow three times a week on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays and roll on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Time will tell!

- Verticutting. This process cuts into the grass sword at right angles and therefore thins out the sword. This was one of my favourite operations but the latest research shows that verticutting every week or so is not healthy for the plant. Therefore, I am going to try monthly scarifying instead. We will see??



verticutter cassette on the top and below a scarifier cassette.

- I will be continuing with the same organics as last season, namely regular applications of Seaweed extract, fish hydrolysate, fulvic acid and compost teas. This hopefully will enable your green to be managed organically to all of our benefits

Fertiliser how much?

I am asked this question a lot now with many people being very concerned with environmental matters. Traditionally, many bowls clubs have relied on so called experts or just keep on doing the same year in year out. Typically, that would be a heavy application of some sort of slow release fertiliser that is purported to give an even release over a period that may be up to 5 months. That seems like a great idea but in practice, the fertiliser granule or prill is made to break down slowly in relation to temperature and moisture content of the root zone. Great in theory but in practice, it will all be released over a 4-5 week period. If applied mid March all of it is gone by the beginning of May. Thus, several months of fertiliser will have been applied in a few weeks. I am told by green-keepers that they have been taking 3 or more bins of grass clippings off of their greens and they seem to think that is a good thing! Think again, they are just building up loads of growth which is much more than is needed and the thatch levels can go up dramatically. Not good.

I am now following a model that comes from PACE turf in the USA. They preach that the amount of fertiliser you apply should be directly related to the volume of clippings coming off. Great. However, what is the optimum volume of grass clippings that I should be aiming towards? My experience says that if I am mowing every other day, then for an average size bowling green I

should be aiming for under 1 mower basket full. Three quarters would be good. This coming season, I will be measuring the grass yield by tipping the clippings into a bucket and recording how many litres there is and recording it in a diary. I will also try to record temperature and moisture levels in the green. This should result in some interesting data for a grass geek like me and I will be discussing my findings with those recorded by Tom Freeman the head green-keeper at High Post Golf Club. He is trialling all sorts of different products as well and so he will be very busy recording his findings.

I was trying to explain my ideas to a part time bowls green-keeper and his eyes just glazed over and I knew I was wasting my time. It is specialist knowhow and we should not be over applying, wasting fertiliser and money whilst not being environmentally correct.

If anyone wants to know more on how to work out how much fertiliser they need to apply, then a good link to follow is:

www.turfhacker.com You will find other articles here, but the one for this was written by Jason Haines. Good luck as I have read it many times and still only understand about three quarters of it!

It is all rather complicated so please have some patience as I may well get things, well not quite right! It will be a mixture of science, instinct and experience, so fingers crossed.

Future Greenkeepers Reports

I try to write something every month but it is not easy not to repeat myself. Our Secretary Allan Mason is now able to add video to the Club's website, so any ideas on what to show will be greatly received.

It had been suggested I explained why, when, etc I use a specific machine so for this month I thought I would start out with the mower I use. A John Deere 220C.

Machinery Insight

The very popular John Deere 220C is an American made mower and ranks in the top five worldwide. It has a 22inch wide mowing cylinder, and has a groomer fitted. The operator is able to engage the mowing cylinder with or without the groomer. The purpose of the groomer, which contra rotates (ie rotates the opposite way of the direction of the mower travel), is to flick or stand up the grass so the grass is better presented to the mower blades. I like to have the groomer engaged maybe twice a week and set at a height of just 1mm below the mower height of cut. The cutting cylinder, which has twelve rotating blades, is adjusted so that there is minimum clearance between it and the static bottom blade., not touching, to enable a good clean cut.

Paul Wright