

British Weather

I am sitting contemplating what I can write that members may wish to read! The house is rather toastie, and the "spring" sunshine streaming through the windows. But my thermometer tells the truth! Last night the temp dipped down to -10C and now is struggling to reach a mere 60C, and this has been the pattern for the last week. Somewhat bizarrely the temperatures in January were warmer!

So grass growth is static, hardly any at all. The fescues that I am encouraging have completely stopped growing leaving a few patches looking rather thin.

But we have passed the Spring Equinox, so we are now getting more than 12 hours daylight,; the green has had its first application of Sustane Revive fertiliser + Bolster + sea weed + a little liquid nitrogen to try to force some growth. January and February were two of the wettest months we have had for some years, and now March and April so far have been two of the driest! I am sure "turfies" up and down the country are moaning about the weather patterns.

I took a bit of a gamble as the weather was very mild for most of the winter, and hit the green hard with scarifying and lots of aeration work. This work WILL pay dividends as the season progresses, but for the start of the season will leave the green struggling a little.

I am sure that I am not alone remembering many season opening days, with members well wrapped up, very keen to get started, but starting roll-ups with the best intentions and after 10 or so ends giving up in favour of a nice hot cuppa and a good warm up. It would seem that this year will be one of those.

So let's hope the weather warms up quickly and we can enjoy a full season of enjoyable bowling.

Leatherjackets

Some members will have noticed a tarpaulin on the green. Well with all chemical control methods of controlling leatherjackets now banned, and the use of predatory nematodes, which I have tried in the past with little reward, I have had to turn the clock way back and try some old greenkeepers methods. One of these is to place a tarpaulin or plastic

sheet on the green. So as long as the green is on the wet side, and the temps are high enough, after approximately 24 hours, most of the leather jackets will surface under the sheet. Then it is a simple case to remove the leatherjackets and dispose of them. It is an old method, but one which if all the conditions are correct will work. At this time it is just to cold!

Another method will be when a prolonged period of rain is forecast, to spray some molasses with a penetrant onto the green and make sure it is well washed in. Leatherjackets are unable to digest simple sugars, and come to the surface to escape this irritant. When they are on the surface the birds will find them or the greenkeeper will!

Leatherjackets this time of the year are growing fast and feen on the youngs roots of the grass, this of course will damage the sward and result in patchy growth. Also the birds will dig their beaks into the turf to find these juicy morsels to eat or to help feed there young. The resulting holes are not just unsightly but are not conducive to good bowling!

I have never tried the molasses method, but if we have a period of rain forecasted, I will give it a go.

Rink marking

Trying to improve the green year on year, season on season, becomes a spiral of diminishing returns. This year one of the more obvious methods has been to initiate a different rink marking system. This system has been the recommendation from Bowls England for a few years now. It will allow many more mat positions, and very importantly a much longer recovery time for each setting.

It may well look confusing how to set up, but fear not I will put out the rink markers on a daily basis, so enjoy.

I mentioned the "rest" period the ends will get under this method. Well it means that each setting will not get used again for a minimum period of a week and a half or so. East / West orientation will in fact get a longer rest period than North / South, although it will be used more, for days a week, rather than the North / South being used only 3 days a week. The present planning, although that may well change, will allow all league games to be played North / South, so no sun in the eyes for evening matches!

So please give this method a good trial for at least this season, as Boscombe Cliff Bowling Club are doing as well.

Nematodes

My last report briefly mentioned nematodes.

So what are they. In short they are microscopic simple organisms that live in most soils. They form part of the, often described " Soil Food Web".

Nematodes come in two distinct types. Root eating and non root eating!

The root eating types do not actually eat the roots, it gets more complicated, but they suck the goodness from the grass roots. This obviously is not good from a greenkeeper's prospective!

The non root eating types are predators, and eat a wide variety of organisms that live in the soil. The main varieties eat bacteria and fungi, an it is the excrement from these nematodes that helps to feed the grass plants. There are also some specialist nematodes that will have as part of their life cycle, other beneficial effects. Such as the nematode that breeds inside leatherjackets so destroys them from the inside out!

It is very easy to get an imbalance in the root zone. Chemical applications can and probably will affect the balance by reducing the number of the good nematodes, as they are not needed, and result in an explosion of the bad guys. Some of you may remember a footballer slipping at Saint Mary's when attempting to take a penalty? Well this was a result of extreme root eating nematodes population exploding to such a level that the turf became unstable! Andy Gray, the head groundsman, overcame the problem by incorporating more organics into his treatments.

I am told that some of the weak patches on the green may well be due to a historical imbalance due to excess wear in some areas, and more recently a lack of nutrition in these same areas. So this year I have already given these areas a little more organic fertilisers, and extra compost tea, and hope that this imbalance of differing types of nematodes can be overcome. It will not be easy and will undoubtedly take time. Fingers crossed I will overcome.

2021 Season

I would like to wish all members a successful and enjoyable bowling season, and hope that with common sense it will pass off without concern.

