

Never Stop Learning

But don't forget the basics.

by KEITH A. HAPP



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IT HAS BEEN said that knowledge is power. For example, knowledge instills confidence to make decisions and to try new techniques. Knowledge also allows us to make informed decisions about new products. Some new techniques produce the desired results while simultaneously enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the efforts put forth to complete a task. On the other hand, many new techniques and ideas do not accomplish the intended goal. Implementing change, just for the sake of change, is not always the right course of action.

Countless journals and trade magazines bombard us with articles and features from all over the country touting new and better ways of accomplishing daily tasks. Researchers develop and evaluate theories, hoping to evolve these theories into tangible practices or procedures for everyday use. Everything starts with a question: "What if I did . . . ?" or "Could we try . . . ?" or "How about if we incorporated . . . ?" The more questions that are asked, the more we learn. Unfortunately, the end user confronts the problem of wading through the new ideas to determine what will be most beneficial.

When considering any new idea, technique, or product, don't forget the basics. Without a sound basic founda-

tion, how can any fine-tuning strategy be helpful? For example, when developing a fertilization program, try to determine the key limiting factor that hinders the utilization of the nutrients supplied. First, evaluate the environment. If the site is too shady, do what is necessary to enhance the light penetration. If the soil remains too wet, take a close look at the irrigation system. Is the water being applied uniformly? If the irrigation system is performing as desired, consider intensifying the aeration program so that the soil can be modified to better meet the needs of the turf. If modification is in order, attempt to achieve (via aeration or internal drainage) a balance of water, soil, and air to allow for sustained growth. Also, evaluate the natural air movement patterns and modify them if necessary. As airflow is enhanced, many of the previously described problems may disappear. As taught in many turfgrass management programs, two of the most important building blocks for strong turf come from the air: carbon and oxygen. Examining the conditions under which the turf is grown may seem like an oversimplification, but how many times are these basic components overlooked when problems arise? After all, sufficient quantities of air, water, and light are essential to all living organisms, and these foundational

elements become increasingly important when outside stresses are imposed.

Another basic turfgrass management concept is mowing. It has been said that a bad mower can make even the best grass look and perform poorly. While planning the year's activities, examine the tools available to maintain the course. Are they adequate enough to meet the rigors of daily use and more than just functional? The mowers, after all, are critical components of the operation's infrastructure, and without a strong infrastructure many other problems can develop.

Finally, don't forget the people who make up the core of the team that prepares the surfaces for play. There are countless activities, conferences, and educational opportunities available for all of the key people who help make the operation a success. Assistant superintendents, golf course mechanics, irrigation specialists, and spray technicians can all gain valuable information when presented with the opportunity to attend state, regional, and national events. After they attend the meetings, take time to ask about their experiences. Simply asking if it was worthwhile, or if they would like to go again, may begin a dialogue that keeps the lines of communication open for some time to come. Concerns, needs, and problems may then be discussed more freely, and this can help the operation to run more smoothly.

Turf managers willingly share their experiences, good and bad, so that others may learn. This in itself makes the profession special. However, many times new concepts or processes are employed simply to keep up with the crowd. The full benefit of any advanced technology cannot be totally realized unless a strong foundation is in place. Keep the horse in front of the cart. You never stop learning; try new ideas, but don't forget the basics.

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