

on the lookout for products that provide an alternative to traditional, Skip has grown compost in roughs, renovation projects

Monthly
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Cherry Valley Club

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“Doing Things A Little Different...”

The war against *Poa annua* is an integral component of Harold

"Skip" Wade's long-term strategy to make his golf course maintenance program at the Cherry Valley Club (garden City, Long Island, NY) environmentally sensitive and ecologically sound, while maintaining the playability of the course. Organic, compost, and alternative are bywords of

"I started this program in '88 with the introduction of organics for a better soil environment, and started to wean the course from the heavy pesticide/fertilizer program that was necessary to maintain the existing *Poa annua* turf." said Skip recently. "*Poa* reduction became paramount in my mind if this was going to work over time. In the beginning, we had severe problems with several fairways and greens that traditionally checked out in the summer due to the *Poa* going south. Over time, some areas on fairways have gone from 100% *Poa* to 50-60% bent/rye." he continued. "We have also been able to reduce our fungicide and insecticide applications from about 1000# of active ingredient to the 250-300# range per year, on 165 total acres, and 25 acres of fairway."

Critical to the success of the program was the involvement of the green committee and club membership at large. "I was lucky to have a strong chairman in the beginning, who was a golfer and didn't mind off-color appearance." commented Skip. "He placed playability before appearance, which really set the tone for the future so I could pursue this organic program. He since went on to become club president, and was a powerful source of support since Day One. Thankfully, my new green chairman has a backbone, as well."

No Easy Road

It has not been a completely blissful experience. "My competence was questioned by

club members, and there were several negative letters written in the early years about me and my program." related Skip. "Communication has been key, though. I use the club newsletter to educate the members, and most everyone has bought into the environmental aspect over time. There is always opposition, particularly among the new members who haven't seen where we have come from."

"There is definitely more pressure doing it this way compared to just going out and spraying like crazy and going home." Skip continued. "I have a little dollar spot here and there, but the members tolerate it because I have explained to

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them that the dollar spot is attacking the *Poa*, which we want to eliminate anyway."

"Early this spring, I posted a bulletin that I wasn't going to fertilize before the *Poa* seedhead populations declined. Other clubs greened up faster, but had also cut their fairways 5 or 6 times more than I had to. With the cool spring this year, the greenup was delayed even further than normal due to the lag in the microbes waking up."

Not Afraid to Try the Untried

(fairways, tees, bunkers and mounds), and fine, screened compost from Long Island Compost Co. as a top dressing throughout the course, as well as in

construction. He has long used humata-based fertilizer products, and has tried Biosys

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"My traditional mindset told me to delay the tees due to the possibility of breaking the reemergent barrier when verticutting... although I'm not sure that's the way CGM works."

Organica, Inc. of Great Neck, NY). "Because healthy soil is the key to healthy turf, I have also been applying a product called Feedback, which is a concentration of naturally occurring soil microbes that, over time, will help bring the soil back to its natural state." said Skip. "If a product makes sense to me, I'll give it a shot."

Corn gluten meal is the latest product Skip is experimenting with. The protein fraction of corn extracted in the wet milling process and traditionally used as an animal feed, corn gluten meal was shown by Dr. Nick Christians at the University of Iowa to exhibit preemergent weed control effects while supplying approximately 10% nitrogen by weight. "I was looking for a natural source of nitrogen, and the preemergent control appeared to be a big bonus in the battle against both crabgrass and Poa annua." commented Skip. Corn gluten meal is marketed under the trade name of A-maizing Lawn by Soil Technologies Corp. of Fairfield, IA.

"Spring applications of corn gluten meal (CGM) have to be timed very accurately to hold off the fertility to suppress Poa, but yet get the material down and activated in time to control crabgrass germination" Skip advised. "I applied CGM to my practice green on December 31, 1994, and within two weeks it was greener than I had ever seen it before at that time of year. That convinced me to apply it to greens, tees, fairways, and any rough areas that had crabgrass problems last year. I watched for first germination in indicator areas,

applied CGM to his fairways at 1/2 rate on May 7 (the seedheads were still there, but declining, according to Skip). The greens were treated on May 20 with a half rate as

"Corn gluten gives the plant a healthy look - not so much vigorous, but strong growth," according to Skip. "I think the fact that the nitrogen is from a protein base rather than the

Skip plans to apply TGR on fairways the end of July, then do a major aeration and seeding the second week in August to foster bentgrass establishment. He anticipates using CGM again as soon as the bent is up and established, for fall Poa germination suppression and as a fall nitrogen source.

What is the downside of using corn gluten meal instead of traditional herbicides and fertilizer materials? "The bulk, the expense, the labor, and the potential nitrogen surge," according to Skip. "CGM is available in a powder form, which is too fine for easy spreading, and a pelletized form which was picked up fairly easily by my greensmowers. I have to find a happy medium between the powder and pelletized forms."

"I could go out and spray the whole place with Acclaim for a lot less money and find cheaper nitrogen sources as well," noted Skip. "I'm just looking for a safer, and more ecologically sound way to do things."

Local Awareness, at a Cost

Skip has recently spearheaded a group of golf course superintendents, environmental activists, and community leaders on Long Island, calling themselves Another Way to Be Green (2Bgreen). "Our sole purpose is to explore alternative methods of turf management, educate the public about what we are doing, and also explain to them why we must use pesticides in certain situations, and that we do so responsibly and with a sensitivity to the environment," explained Skip. "Some superintendents have been supportive, others have been highly critical but I am used to that."

"After my program at Cherry Valley was featured in an article in the New York Times

... as I experiment with natural methods. My golf course is not perfect, but I believe in what I'm doing. I can go to sleep each night knowing that I'm doing all I can to ensure the safety of the trees, employees, and the environment here at Cherry Valley."