

## GOLF COURSE MANAGEMENT: WORK DIARY - MAY 2013

### Overview

For much of the southern half of the UK, April was fairly dry but with generally cooler than average temperatures. Rain that did fall tended to be more so in Scotland and northern England making April by far the driest month of the year so far, at least in the south and east of the UK. Temperatures did soar for a few days before plummeting back to single figures within 48 hrs; thus highlighting the fluctuating conditions that turf managers are faced with. However, April did provide sufficient recovery for the majority of courses, albeit somewhat on the slow side. Mowing started to gather pace during the



second half of the month and for some, this also heralded the start of using irrigation water to help wash-in fertiliser and top dressings and to avoid putting surfaces from becoming 'crusty' on top. For those who renovated greens and tees early in the year, the small amount of growth has helped in the recovery process. By late April, Poa Annua has usually started to self-seed but this year there have been few signs of this to date. However, both daisies and dandelions are noticeably flowering while grass growth is slower in comparison. April has once again proved to be a month more akin to winter than summer, ending with temperatures below the norm and with still the threat of overnight frosts for many. Early indications for May would suggest a rise in temperatures, good levels of sunshine but not much in the way of rain. This will mean an 'orderly' increase in mowing while aiming to prevent surfaces from drying out. As average day time temperatures reach 14° - 15° Celsius, the frequency of mowing will intensify. Under normal May conditions, the longer periods of sunshine and warmer weather should lead to steady growth and full recovery from winter wear. By the end of the month, good playing conditions and course presentation levels should satisfy the majority of golfers. For the next 8 weeks or so, UK growth reaches a peak, therefore the emphasis will be on mowing frequency, general trimming, tidying and course presentation, as long as sufficient moisture remains within the soil. As witnessed last month, conditions have a habit of changing quickly, therefore it is best to be prepared for all eventualities. In the last 5 years, May has tended to be drier than the longer term average and even during last year's record summer rainfall, there was a two week spell when conditions were very warm and dry.

### Greens

With playing levels, competitions and matches also intensifying, customer expectations become greater and with it, the challenge to produce firm, smooth surfaces with minimal golfer disruption. With daily mowing at around the summer norm of 4mm or less, there will be a need to supply the turf with 'little and often' applications of foliar feed, consisting of mainly Nitrogen, with other nutrients and ingredients such as Potassium & Seaweed extracts added to the mix as required and in order to meet the turf's needs. Light top dressings are a must for surface preparation; again 'little and often' being the ideal practice. Aeration should also continue, using a mix of micro, needle or star tines which give maximum effect and almost zero turf disturbance. Sarel rollers are another alternative; the main objectives being to 'vent' the root-zone and to allow water to move quickly from the surface and into the root-zone, thus encouraging the turf to root deeper. Should conditions remain relatively dry during May, then irrigate deeply but infrequently and supplement with hand watering and wetting agent gel to any ridges, shoulders or raised areas. The application of a 'blanket' wetting agent will be a monthly requirement if there has been a history of dry patch or drought stress. This needs to be started early and supplemented by hand to key areas. For greens with high organic matter content (OM or thatch) this is now a good month for deep scarifying, as long as drought conditions do not prevail. With soil temperatures now above 10° Celsius, recovery will be quicker. In order to remove as much decaying material as possible, the greens should be deep scarified using 3 to 4mm width blades. When doing so, use the **75% principle** when deep scarifying. Never exceed 75% of the blade spacing when setting the working depth, ie if spacing at 30mm, then maximum depth is 22.5mm. Greater depth requires wider

spacing to avoid turf damage. If not using a sand injecting machine, then top dress immediately afterwards in order to direct sand into the grooves as best as possible. This will further dilute the level of thatch as well as firming up the playing surface. This is also a good opportunity to over-seed since the open grooves provide an ideal seed bed. However, if a substantial amount of thatch remains, then now is probably not the time to be overly aggressive. Future mowing height also needs to be taken into consideration following seed germination, namely this needs to be set at 4.5mm or above, otherwise the young seedlings are unlikely to survive. Routine brushing and grooming will continue as and when required along with periodic verti-cutting but avoid the latter if greens have been over-seeded. For those with poa annua seed heads to control, then surface refinement measures will be high on the list of priorities this month. The use of a PGR such as Primo Maxx will help to divert the plant's energy into shoot and root growth as well as suppressing poa seed heads. This also has the added benefit of reduced feeding and watering, albeit not in any great amount but it does help to provide a denser and tight knit sward where rolling can replace mowing a couple of times per week. Best results are obtained when mixed with a small amount of foliar Nitrogen and Iron.

### **Tees**

Daily movement of tee markers and regular divoting are essential for providing golfers with a good and clean playing surface. Mowing will be at the appropriate summer height, generally between 10 and 15mm with frequency at two or three times per week, preferably with clippings being 'boxed-off'. A further general feed is unlikely during the month but an application of Primo Maxx will prove beneficial, especially if irrigation coverage is weak or water supply limited. Adding just a small amount of Nitrogen to the mix will again prove beneficial for both turf density and colour. Apart from the possible need for selective weed control, it is unlikely that any further work other than the routine requirements will be in demand during May. It is more attention to detail and presentation of playing areas and cleanliness of tee accessories that are important to the golfers. Any winter tees previously renovated may need another over-seed and dressing if recovery has been slow or inconsistent. Also check that there is good irrigation coverage to the teeing surface, especially following any over-seeding work.



**LEFT: Good, firm and well presented teeing surfaces at the start of the season**

**RIGHT: Low cut greens surrounds around bunker to promote true links conditions**

### **Surrounds**

Mowing will now be the main requirement with collars being cut at least twice per week, usually at the same mowing height as the tees or perhaps marginally lower. Green surrounds are usually mown once per week but conditions may dictate that some or all receive a second cut. Cylinder or rotary ride-on triples are best suited for this work and give good consistency and presentation to these playing areas. Mowing height for surrounds is generally between 35 and 50mm although on links courses, these areas may be cut shorter where swales and 'run-off' areas are integral features. However, the lower the mowing height, the greater the likelihood of drought stress and possible 'scalping' of undulating features. This certainly needs to be taken into consideration where water use is restricted. Any traffic control measures at this time of year should now be limited to essential areas only and be of a discreet nature unless wet weather prevails. As per tees, an application of a selective herbicide may be required, albeit more likely to be on a spot controlled basis for dandelions, daisies and plantains mainly.

## Fairways

By early May, any pre-season work of aerifying, scarifying and fertilising will have been completed and playing surfaces now close to being in peak condition. Mowing frequency will be at twice per week for most, although some clubs may have a need for alternate day mowing if growth is excessive. This was the case during the wet May years of 2007 & 2008 when dry mowing conditions were in short supply. Faced with this type of challenge and unless Primo Maxx is applied throughout, then the use of a blower may be required to disperse clippings and leave a clean surface. Obviously this is more labour intensive but if wet days become the norm, then there may be little alternative. Afternoon mowing is another option if mornings remain wet and this requires flexibility with staff working hours. On fairways where stalks of ryegrass or other species prevail, then an occasional pass with a rotary mower set at around 30mm will suffice. Other than mowing, periodic divot filling may be required and there are various alternatives that can be utilised to achieve this, such as 'member' or 'junior' evenings accompanied by a welcome pizza and drink. These type of work parties can cover fairways quickly as well as creating good team spirit within the club. With regards to weed control, the same criteria apply as per tees and surrounds.

## Bunkers

With playability and presentation being at the forefront during May, it is very much a case of regular raking and brushing of sand from the banks and removal of any stone or other debris. Trimming and edging is likely to be a four to five week requirement although some clubs prefer to carry out this work on an on-going 'rolling' plan of tackling 4 or 5 holes each week. Either method will suffice, the main objectives being to deliver consistency of sand depth, quality of sand and overall presentation. Regular checking of sand depth during raking will alert the need for replenishment or relocation of sand. Where wash-out damage has occurred it is a case of moving and then firming the sand back into place until a long term solution can be found to minimise this occurrence.

## Roughs

Growth will also be strong in most areas of semi-rough and rough with mowing frequency being adjusted to whatever is deemed necessary to keep these areas under control. Heavy or fertile sites will produce abundant growth whereas poorer soils or those courses on links or open heaths will be faced with much less of a growth challenge. Whatever the course type or set-up with roughs, it is important to maintain these 'in-play' areas in a tidy manner, thus avoiding the annoyance of slow play through searching for lost balls. This is one of the golfer's pet hates so this aspect needs to be constantly under review during periods of strong growth.



Weed control to fairways and roughs using the appropriate selective herbicide

## Other

**Paths:** More a repetition from the previous months whereby surfaces are maintained as smooth as possible and free from weeds and invasive grasses etc, especially in and around sleepered steps, benches and ball washers. The use of Glyphosate is the one remaining pesticide suitable for this purpose but best to choose a calm day, preferably early in the morning and ahead of play.

**Trees:** Any remaining work around tree bases with glyphosate should also be completed this month. The same applies to any boundary fencing or walls where there is a need to maintain a tidy edge to prevent ball loss. This work should be limited to key playing areas due to the environmental impact of such work.

**Ditches/Ponds/Lakes:** The former should be strimmed and cleaned out, with glyphosate applied where it is deemed appropriate in order to ensure good water flow when relevant and also to avoid ball searches. Ponds and lakes should be maintained in as natural a condition as possible but if shallow and/or small, the build-up of algae may be a problem. Where this problem exists, rolls of barley straw should be inserted well in advance to counter the build-up of this 'blanket' covering of surface water. Good air-flow and depth of water are essential but unfortunately many such water features are not blessed with either of these criteria with the result that many become overgrown with bulrushes. In this situation, a 'rolling' plan of excavation for clearing bulrushes may be the only viable option if 'visible' water is required.

### **Watchlist:**

**Disease:** Take-All Patch which is a soil borne pathogen, is likely to be the only disease risk at this time of year, but only if surface pH levels are high or the water supply or sand used in top dressings are more alkaline. If there



Example of Take All Patch disease affecting a bent/poa putting surface

has been prolonged use of non-sulphur based fertilisers then TAP could be a threat, thus highlighting the need for regular soil analysis as well as good observation and record keeping. This allows any changes in fertiliser programs to be based on having accurate data, thus an informed decision can be made. Chemical control can be attained by using products containing Azoxystrobin but this will only treat the symptom not the cause.

**Turf Disorders:** Dry patch and drought stress are likely to be the most common turf disorders during May unless there are long term issues such as nutrient deficiency, black layer, thatch & so on. Regards the former and as already mentioned under 'Greens', the key is to act early and ensure that both water and wetting agent penetrate the root-zone. Also see last month's comments.

**Weeds:** As mentioned previously in this month's diary, May is the ideal time for selective weed control, with daisies, plantains, buttercup and dandelion likely to being the main targets. If out of play roughs suffer from thistle then this too can be treated but may require a second application in about 6 weeks time. There are numerous selective herbicides on the market but best to check that the active ingredients listed are relative to the weeds to be controlled since some weed types require specific targeting such as yellow suckling clover.

### **Equipment & Irrigation:**

Regular servicing, checking and setting up of cutting units will now be standard practice for the next 6 months or so, therefore it is essential to 'log' and replace the parts being used as well as completing all service records in whatever system is being used. This will help to keep a check on how much each machine is costing and the frequency of breakdowns. This is good practice and adds weight to any future request for replacement equipment. Irrigation usage will now intensify, especially if current weather predictions run true. Regular checks and adjustments of sprinkler heads will ensure that the system is working to its full potential and even during periods of rain, it is good practice to carry out periodic testing for coverage, performance, shut downs and leaks. If water is in short supply and for whatever reason, then judicious use along with the use of wetting agents and other sensible management practices ie mowing height, will help to maintain good turf quality. Better to be pro-active as opposed to being re-active!



Checking and adjusting sprinkler head coverage for maximum performance

### **Stock Control:**

As the new season is now in full swing, maintain regular checks on machine parts, irrigation joints, wetting agent, turf conditioners, foliar feeds and so on, replacing those that have been used. Also ensure that there is a ready supply of spare tee markers, flag pins, hazard posts & so on in case of theft or damage.

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