



Maintenance - Moss



As many members have noted over the past few years some of our greens have become home to Silvery thread moss.

This is the light green densely packed spots about the size of a ball mark. Some greens have a lot of these spots, some only a few. It is not a fungus but is a primitive chlorophyll plant that lacks a rooting structure. Moss is not parasitic in nature and does not directly harm the turfgrass. If given an opportunity to colonize an area such as an unrepaired ball mark it will do so. Too many of these spots and you get a bumpy green that does not putt true.

In the past moss was not a problem on golf greens but now it has become an issue. This is due to several factors. The first and most significant factor is the change in pesticide regulations that removed mercuric type fungicides from the market in the early 1990's. In addition to controlling their target pest (i.e. dollar spot fungus) the mercury compounds were toxic to any moss type plant. In effect moss control in the past was a byproduct of our standard fungus control of the day. As the years passed since the ban the mercuric levels in the greens have fallen to the point where they no longer have any effect on the moss. Other factors causing an environment favorable to moss development are

- decreased height of cut in an effort to have faster green speed
- lower levels of nitrogen fertilization which also tends to faster green speed
- increased frequency of watering to make up for the loss of grass canopy due to the lower height.
- increased traffic on the modern golf course

On closely mown turf like a green moss spreads by fragmentation. Any process that shreds the plant and doesn't remove all the material will enable the plant to spread to any available spot such as a ball mark. Since the plant doesn't grow tall the regular mowing process does not contribute to the spread due to the blades passing over the top of the plant. Any process that digs into the turf such as raking, verticutting or simple impact by a golf ball has a potential to spread the moss.

If allowed to go unchecked the greens will become progressively uneven in roll since the height of the grass and the natural height of the moss are different.

Presently the chemical remedies available to the US are not legal for use in Canada. The most effective chemical is going through the registration process here and, once available, will be used to definitely deal with the moss at Garrison.

For the meantime we intend to take some measures to discourage the moss. These will include a slight increase in mowing height to give the grass more vigor, an increase in nitrogen to also build up the turf vigor and a decreased frequency of watering so that the greens will dry out somewhat between water applications. The drying of the green will tend to stunt the moss since it has no rooting structure that will allow it to reach water deeper in the soil. None of these steps will eliminate the moss but they will lessen its ability to compete with the turfgrass.

As a golfer you may ask what's this going to do to the greens? They will tend to be slower from the greater fertilization and raised height of cut and less consistent from one day to the next as they dry and are then watered heavily. To combat these effects we intend to roll more frequently and to perform light topdressing on a regular basis. These procedures will smooth and slick the turf surface and restore their speed to the Garrison norms.

We hope all our members will support us in this task by making a real effort to fix all your ball marks.

David Erb
Superintendent