The Golf Course at Mountain Lake

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Mr. Floyd has requested me, in preparing this paper, to try and give such information as would apply to lawns, generally, and I have tried to do so, mentioning our golf course at Mountain Lake only at such times as the methods practised there, might be of use to private lawn owners.

The first nine holes of our course were constructed during the season of 1916, with fairly good results. The second nine, making a complete eighteen-hole course, was built in 1920, with splendid results, owing, largely, to good seasonal conditions and our previous experiences. The entire course was laid out by Mr. Seth J. Raynor, a noted golf architect of New York City. All that we had to do, was the construction work. That is enough history I believe, for this paper, but a great deal more could be said if a true biography of the course were demanded.

In preparing land for grass, the methods used, and the thoroughness of preparation differs in no way to the preparing of ground for potatoes, a citrus grove, or any other commercial planting. I believe that I am correct in saying, that the great trouble with the average person in planting a lawn, or large acreage, to grass, is that he does not take into consideration the very important fact that his crop will need caring for, in the way of fertilizer, water, etc., exactly the same as his commercial crop. One fertilizes orange trees, gardens, etc., at certain periods during their development, so why not do the same with a lawn and get the most from one's work in like proportion that you endeavor to get from the commercial crop.

I believe that it might be interesting to know of the methods used at Mountain Lake, if only for their criticism, so, with your permission, I will outline each step, hurriedly, starting with the preparation of the ground. This same routine can, and is, used to advantage by the man who only plants a small area.

After thoroughly clearing, our ground is plowed with a tractor and three-disc plow, as deeply as six or seven inches, which will get most of that under-ground growth, called gopher-root. The roots that are thus exposed, are then picked up by hand, burned, and the soil thoroughly pulverized with the disc and the Acme harrow. Whether the land will need the second plowing depends on the condition after this final harrowing. One plowing is usually sufficient in our local sandy soil.

The next step is, to get the Bermuda, St. Augustine or other grass roots, that we have decided to use for our lawn. We
have found that the most economical way of digging these roots, is to have a one or two horse plow precede a crew of men armed with ordinary potato hooks, with which to turn the furrows and shake the loose soil from the plants, so that, with an additional shaking with a fork when loading on the wagon or truck, the grass roots are practically free from soil. The plants are then brought where they are to be planted and thoroughly watered, or, if water is available where the grass is dug, it is always advisable to wet them at once, although this adds considerably to the weight, in carting.

Whether the fertilizer to be used is commercial or barn-yard, can only be determined by each one, after considering the cost of each, availability and the needs of the soil. The soil which shows a good native cover crop, requires less of the organic matter than one that is barren and lifeless. If we should decide on the stable manure, and there is nothing better, it is a very good time to apply this, immediately preceding the planting of the grass roots, so that it can be plowed in with them.

There are several methods of planting that can be followed, greatly depending on the acreage to be covered. For the small area, a forked orange tree stake, a lath, both sharpened at one end, or a small hand plow, can be used, but for the large area, the old reliable mule and plow will give the best results.

The thickness in planting the grass roots, can only be determined by the results desired. One can skip a furrow or plant in every furrow, depending on how long he wants to wait for his lawn, or how soon he wants to get through with his work. We plant in every furrow, tearing the roots apart so that they will cover as much ground as possible, laying them, practically, continuously in the furrow. The grass needs only to be covered, thoroughly, and I do not believe that there is any specific depth that could be recommended, although we try to cover the roots at least, two or three inches, running the plow only deep enough to hold the furrow.

After the grass is planted, the fertilizer, if commercial, is applied, the ground smoothed and rolled, this smoothing and rolling serving to mix the fertilizer with the soil. This last year, we applied a formula analyzing 4-7-1, derived from nitrate of soda and sulphate of ammonia, cotton seed meal, goat manure, Peruvian guano, super-phosphate and ground tobacco stems, at the rate of 1,200 pounds per acre, making a second application in sixty days of a smaller quantity per acre. On grass that was planted on August 15, we had a perfect stand by the first of December. There are, of course, different formulas, and one need only ask any reputable fertilizer concern, or their representative, for advice, to determine what to use.

In watering lawns, it is always advisable, as far as possible, to do this either in the early morning or late in the evening, when the heat of the sun is not nearly as liable to burn the wet tender grasses, as would be the case if the watering were done during the heat of the day. Then, too, the evaporation is less at these stated periods, than at mid-day.
If one wants the effect of a deep rich lawn, in winter, similar to some of the best lawns in the north in summer, Italian Rye seed, broadcasted on the Bermuda turf and covered lightly with a top-dressing of soil, will, in about two or three weeks, if kept moist, give you the results desired.

It has been stated in bulletins, and papers, previously, that a periodical renovating of Bermuda sod, is very beneficial, and in our experience, this statement has been proven. We try, about every two or three years, to plow or disc our Bermuda sod, judging by the condition of the grass to determine when this is necessary. This renovating is particularly necessary in our high pine land, where the grass is noticed, at the end of the period mentioned, to lose strength of growth. By turning this sod, a new and vigorous growth is invariably the result. A light application of fertilizer is very beneficial at this time.

In preparing our putting greens for the winter season, we mow them as closely as possible, to the ground, letting the cuttings drop. This is usually done by the first of November. We then fertilize them thoroughly and get them reasonably moist, following immediately with Italian Rye Seed and Red Top, the latter giving a much finer texture to the green than the Rye, alone.

Our hard work is then over, and all one has to do, is to mow, water and feed them regularly, and get them in such shape that no matter how badly a golf ball is putted, it will, ultimately, fall in the cup, which, believe me, is no small undertaking, golf players, as a rule criticizing everything about a green before recognizing their own errors.

It would seem to me, that the secret, if it is such, of getting a good lawn in Florida, is the same as in the north. One would not think of planting a lawn, there, without first applying, liberally, an application of stable manure if nothing else; and here, in God's country, we surely need to give the same care and attention to one of the finest and most beautiful landscape features, possible—a well kept lawn.