

Greencraft
With Dave Bracey



Where the grass is always greener

The question of when to water

WHEN the subject of watering crops up at various green maintenance seminars around the country, I invariably point out that the best and most reliable indication is to look at the dew (or result of guttation to be more technical).

When the grass plants are functioning correctly, the waste from the plant is passed through the stems to the leaves and out through minute mouths (the stomata). This is where the plant breathes in the atmosphere, and without going too deeply into the function of the leaf, carbon, oxygen and nitrogen, plus whatever is surrounding the leaf, is absorbed into the stomata.

When the process is not going on the plant has to pass out its waste and, of course, it has to spill out or is pumped through the stomata.

It now follows that if this dew-like function 'guttation' is working, then the plant is functioning properly and is not under stress.

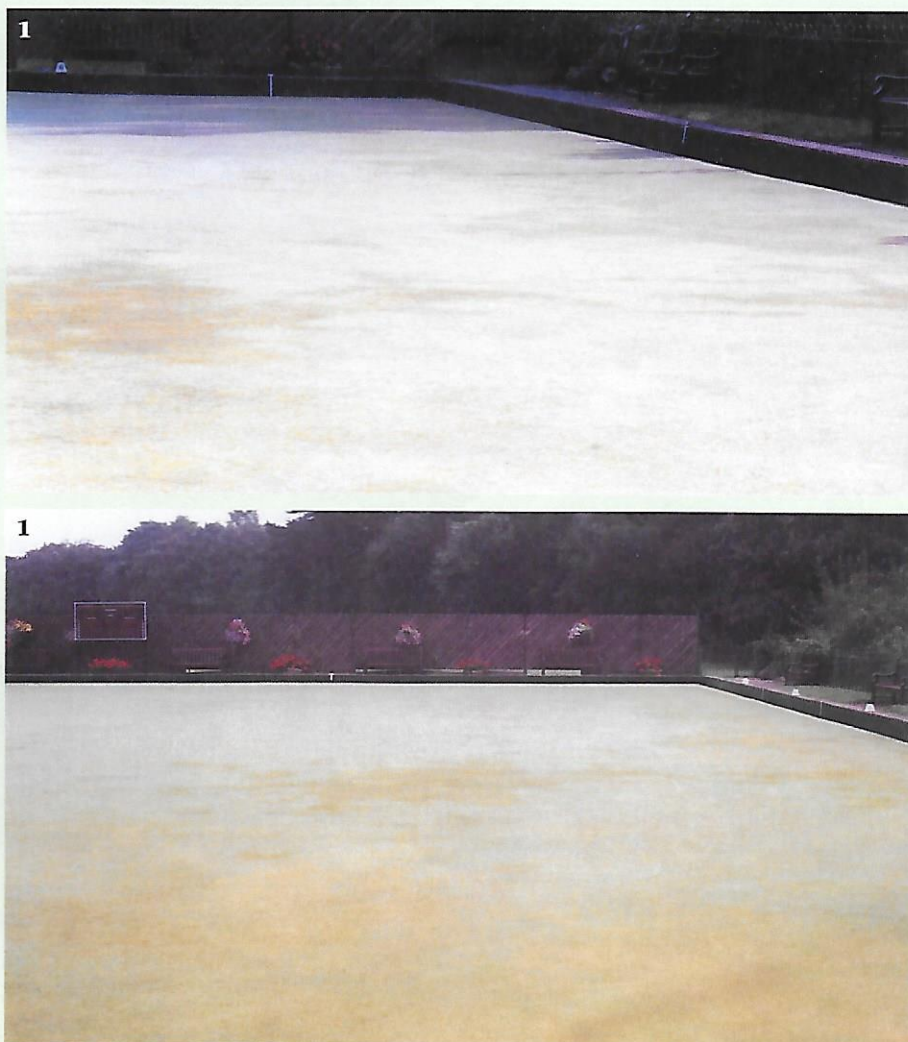
If, however, the plants are suffering stress, particularly through not enough water, then the dew as we will call it, will indicate something is missing and that, of course, will be water.

On many visits to bowling greens when water is mentioned, I am told that the water has been on for ten minutes in each place with pop-up sprinklers. A healthy green produces nine pints of waste per square yard per hour when the plants are functioning properly. This waste is recycled the following day.

Turf should be kept moist down to approximately six inches at all times. The plant food in the soil water can only be used if the soil is moist.

As soon as turf starts to dry out, either as a result of the sun, wind or by mowing too short, the first indication will be the absence of dew in the affected areas.

Photograph 1 shows turf that is showing signs of drying out in some places. These areas need to be soaked for about ten minutes in each place and two days later (see **Photograph 2**) it can be seen that the turf is already functioning much better. The following morning I



give it another ten minutes in each place and the turf is back to normal.

Being able to control the watering allows us to sail 'close to the wind' in controlling the speed of our greens. What does play a great part in controlling the water is recycling the water that comes out of the turf.

Removing the dew with a brush or switch (a brush is preferable) helps the water to be guided down to the base of the turf. A flexible drag-mat is also better than nothing, but as long as we do the recycling before the wind or sun dries the moisture out of the turf, it does not matter how we return the water to the

soil. I think that if I have to get the hose pipe out before the end of July, then not enough spiking has been done through the Winter months, enabling the roots to find easier access lower down.

There is a high reservoir under most greens and that can contain water in one form or another and every endeavour should be made during the Winter months to get every drop of rainwater into it for re-use during the Summer.

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