



December 22, 2006

KEN'S KORNER

G R E A T E B A Y C O U N T R Y C L U B

YUCK!

This time of year many of the fairways seem to top-dressed with worm castings, and then too, some of the greens, tees, and collars, seem a bit overtaken too! Although sometimes messy, and sometimes “bumpy”, the castings are a sign that things are getting better. Much better!

Earthworm activity indicates that the soil is healthy, but also, having earthworms makes the soil even better! Burrowing creates channels for air and gaseous exchange, and water penetration. Earthworms consume organic matter, break it down into nutrients through digestion, and release it through castings into the soil and upon the soil surface, substantially improving fertility. These processes combined move soil from the sub layers to the top, tilling and turning over the soil much like a plough! In all, the earthworm is considered the most important animal that positively influences the quality of the soil. Soils without earthworms are much less fertile, lack structure, and so are terribly unproductive.

Too often, superintendents are asked to rid their golf courses of earthworms because golfers do not want castings. This is understandable, but environmentally, it is wrong. To kill millions of earthworms takes large amounts of expensive, harsh pesticides, applied often. In doing so, the soil becomes sterile of life, and over time unsustainable. More fertilizers and chemicals, along with more aeration and mechanical disturbance are needed to counteract this loss of soil virility. It becomes a downward spiral dependent on pesticides to a hard crash. Not a crash landing...just a big crash! Where castings are a problem, we drag, brush, or “whip” them to break them up, which also serve to release and spread out the nutrients. This method is much better, I think, than the other!

I am happy to see so many earthworms in the fall and spring. In a way, it's a great report card on the soils, and it is a natural process that is time proven to be unmatched by anything man can, or will ever do, to make soil better!

Thanks for your interest!

Kenneth B. Thompson
Golf Course Superintendent, Greate Bay CC

cc: Tom Kuhar, VP-Operations

It's always a Greate day at Greate Bay!