



MLSN newsletter #27

A modern method for soil test interpretation

Hello,

This article includes regional MLSN updates, a brand new seminar explaining a complete philosophy of turfgrass nutrition (including MLSN), and the curious but not uncommon case of inverted soil nutrient levels.

First, though, let's look at a couple upcoming events:

- [GCSAA Conference and Trade Show, February 2026](#): I'll be teaching two seminars in Orlando, one on February 3 and one on February 4. Both seminars deal with growth rate. Grass nutrient requirements are proportional to the growth rate. In these seminars, I will explain straightforward ways to understand and adjust this relationship to optimize playing surfaces. If you are going to the show, I hope you'll join me in one of these.
- The Thai GCSA's popular [Sustainable Turfgrass Management in Asia](#) conference is back in Pattaya from March 9–11. Come join us for three days of world class turfgrass education, networking, and fun.

A screencast worth watching

- [Complete Philosophy](#) seminar screencast

I was in Svendborg earlier this month for the Danish Greenkeepers Conference—[all my slides are here](#). One of my talks was about A Complete Philosophy of Turfgrass Nutrition. I've recorded a screencast that I hope many of you will watch. It explains a *lot* about MLSN in only 30 minutes. Pro-tip: speed it up to 1.5x and it's still easy to follow, but now only takes 20 minutes. I explain the beer analogy at the end of this one. But I hope you'll watch the whole thing.

Regional MLSN

John Emerson's article in the USGA Green Section Record research section was published in June:

- [Indexing the Soil Nutrient Status of Turfgrass Systems to Develop Regional MLSN Guidelines: A Delaware Case Study](#)

The take-home message for me from that comprehensive survey of soil nutrient levels under turfgrass in Delaware is this: good turf is being produced at soil nutrient levels consistent with the MLSN values, and there's potential for refining this approach for regional conditions.

Soil nutrient inversion

It's normal to think that grass will perform better when there are more nutrients in the soil, and that as soil nutrients decrease, turf performance may suffer. But what if it was the other way around? What if the relationship was actually inverted, and turf performance was better in soils with lower nutrient levels?

I wrote a blog post about that: [Good Turf, Bad Turf, and MLSN](#).

It turns out that in intensively maintained and fertilized turfgrass areas, where clippings are removed, it's not uncommon at all to find soil nutrient levels *lower* where the best turf is growing and to find soil nutrients *higher* in the areas with weak turf. That's one of many reasons I recommend using MLSN to develop fertilizer recommendations.

Fertilizer recommendations

Speaking of fertilizer recommendations, if you'd like me to have a look at your soil tests and make recommendations, I can do that (for a fee). And you can get your laboratory testing done through me as your consultant at Brookside Labs. Have a look at [ATC's soil testing services](#).

New York golf industry survey

Did you see that [a recent survey of golf courses in New York state](#) found 47% of respondents answered yes to the statement "When soil testing, results are interpreted using Minimum Levels [for] Sustainable Nutrition guidelines."

MLSN and Jim Arthur quotes

In 2018 I wrote an article that I titled "[Making Sense of Turf Nutrition](#)." The article was published in *Greenkeeper International* but I didn't share the published version until this year. By the time I read it again last month more than seven years after writing it, I was pleasantly surprised to see some Jim Arthur quotes in it, including this doozy about soil testing:

"soil chemists, backed by fertiliser salesmen with no knowledge of botany or golf, set up arbitrary standards and analysed soils as a commercial gimmick."

Of course there's a way around that commercial gimmick, and that of course is what MLSN is all about.

Here's a reminder that if you like to listen to conversations and monologues and anecdotes and arguments about turfgrass management, the [ATC Podcast Network](#) has exactly those. With three different shows—The ATC Doublecut, Office Hours, and Turf Without Borders, you will almost certainly find something that can entertain or educate—hopefully some of both.

Thanks for reading.

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