

HANDS ON



Joel Jackson, CGCS
Disney's Bonnet Creek G. C.
Central Florida Chapter, FGCSA



Topdressing

Eagle Pines superintendent Pat Hennessey (foreground) checks the density of the DOT sand topdressing being applied by Bill King with a pull-behind type spreader.

Why? What? and How?

The following Central Florida superintendents contributed to this article: Chuck Blankenship, Zellwood Station GC; Stuart Leventhal, CGCS, Interlachen CC; Brian Jenkins, Dubsdread GC; Don McCommon, Ventura GC; Joe Ondo, Winter Pines GC; Dennis Parker, Rio Pinar CC; Hal Richburg, Heathrow CC

Why?

Topdressing is that process used by superintendents to smooth out and speed up the putting surfaces of greens and

keep tees smooth and level. While it is a beneficial process for the longevity and playability of the turf, it is a process viewed with trepidation by the golf pro, the members, the mechanic, and even the superintendent himself.

No amount of assurances from the superintendent can dissuade the golf pro and the members from perceiving that greens are going to be "messed up" for awhile when they see that top dressing being applied. Contrary to their perception, the greens actually hold shots better after a heavy topdressing. While the green speed may be slower for a few days, the quality will improve rapidly as the grass blades grow up through the topdressing

and are clipped off on the new smooth even surface.

To minimize the negative impact of topdressing, the superintendent, golf pro and club manager need to prepare a yearly maintenance calendar so the renovation dates can be set well in advance to avoid impacting important tournament events. When considering date selections, the superintendent should make his fellow managers and greens chairman aware of the importance of timing certain procedures to maximize the effect of the renovation. Revolving dates around an arbitrary events calendar can reduce the effectiveness of the necessary cultural practices. By publishing this calendar in the



Bill King (left) and Eagle Pines working foreman, Bill Manson (right), use a modified dump trailer to refill the spreader at each green.



WEED/SWEEP Kills Weeds *without spraying ...*

The new Weed/Sweep is a must for every golf course. You achieve precision control of weeds by using new dripless chemical wiping technology. The system can be easily mounted on an ATV or pulled behind a golf cart or small tractor. **FREE** brochure by mail or ask for a demo at your course. Don't put it off - Call today.

- ▶ No bulky water tanks needed
- ▶ Precision placement on unwanted growth - no overspray
- ▶ Comes complete with pump, feed lines, filters
- ▶ Lightweight aluminum frame and mounting brackets

Chemical Containers, Inc.

800-346-7867

P.O. BOX 1307 Lake Wales, FL 33859 • (813) 638-1407 • Fax (813) 638-8132

• TURF TRACER • FOAM GARD • RUST BUSTER • BEAUTY GREEN • PENETROL • KICK IN THE GRASS • TURF IRON • SUPER WET • EV R GREEN •

ALMAR

Quality
Service
Economy

CHEMICAL CO. INC.

P.O. BOX 18101
TAMPA, FL 33679

**CALL COLLECT:
813-839-3363**

STUART COHEN
EAST FLA.

RUSS VARNEY
WEST FLA.

• KNOCK M' DED • GRIME OFF • GREEN LAPPING SOAP • RUST BAN • GREEN MAGIC • TURF KOTE • WATER PENN • GREEN MASTER • SCRAM II •



Dan Koronka uses a pull-behind drag brush to work the topdressing into the turf.

club newsletter, with timely reminders as the time approaches, members can plan their outings and avoid hosting guests when the course isn't in its best condition.

Emergency or light topdressings can be accomplished without much notice because they address an immediate, easily identifiable problems, i.e. thin areas from transition, algae, vandalism. Light summer topdressings are usually unnoticed by the players.

Most superintendents in Central Florida have two major top dressings each year. One in the spring and one in late summer or early fall. These topdressings follow greens aerifications and the heavy applications are needed to fill in the resulting holes. Light topdressings vary in frequency depending on the operation of the club. Most superintendents on the panel tried to stick to a three- to four-week schedule of light topdressings during the summer. Hal Richburg mentioned that private clubs traditionally used Mondays as maintenance days and could often accomplish such activities like topdressing on those closed days. However, he noted that more and more clubs are using Mondays to host outside groups to help generate revenue for the club.

Stuart Leventhal and **Dennis Parker** believe that frequent light topdressing are very beneficial in maintaining Tifgreen 328 greens in the summer when they are the most difficult to manage.

One of the other benefits of topdressing is thatch control. Most superintendents believe that two heavy topdressings per year address that issue when combined with verticutting and aerifying. Superintendents who follow a program of frequent light verticutting and vertigrooming must balance topdressing applications against these verticutting schedules so they are not constantly disturbing the applied topdressing.

What?

Most superintendents use a straight sand for topdressing called "D.O.T. sand". The particle size distribution of this sand generally falls within the range specified by the USGA for use in greens mixes. When applying this sand to the surface in a light application, several superintendents felt that the particles in the coarse portion of the range posed a problem for their mowers and in obtaining the desired smoothness from the topdressing.

Chuck Blankenship said he believes that D.O.T. sand is too coarse and causes the exposed lips of the cups on the greens

to crumble and give way during play. These concerns have caused some superintendents to use a "concrete sand" or other sand that has additional screening to eliminate particles larger than 2.0 mm. It is important to make sure the selected sand is coarse enough to allow a good percolation rate and not so fine as to cause a layering effect which will impede water penetration.

Joe Ondo at the Winter Pines GC continues to use an 85% sand to 15% Canadian peat mix that is identical to the greens mix which has been used to rebuild his greens. Joe likes to keep a small amount organic in his mix which he feels aids in water retention and fertilizer and pesticide efficacy.

How?

Top dressing can be applied by a variety of methods ranging from wheelbarrow and shovel or mechanical spreaders. Someone with new, soft greens may consider the former method to avoid causing tire mark impressions, but most use a pull-behind spreader attached to a utility vehicle. Some used a Cushman spreader mounted in place of the cargo bed. Other choices included Viccon and Lely spreaders for frequent but light topdressings. The new Terra Topper is also ideal for

light applications. For those who have tried unsuccessfully to apply a light top-dressing with a conveyor belt-type spreader, Stuart and Dennis both attest that applying a silicone caulk to the seam in the belt eliminates the skips and misses when attempting a low or light setting.

After the top dressing has been spread and has dried, it is worked into the turf by using a drag. The old metal doormat type of drag has given way to pull-behind dragbrushes by Standard and Gandy. Again, if you have soft greens and wish to avoid using utility vehicles you might want to consider walking and pulling doubled-handled tennis court brushes. Stuart does this after his light topdressings.

Brian Jenkins uses a drag mat made of indoor/outdoor carpet with the top surface down. On top of the indoor/outdoor piece he has a piece of regular shag carpet with some medium heavy chain in an "H" or "box" pattern for weight. The mat can be rolled up for transport from green to green. The two layers of carpet and chain are held together with nylon ties. The leading edge of the carpet is secured between two two-by-fours on which is attached the pull ropes that connect to the towing vehicle. After heavy topdressings, he often uses a board float to move the sand around before a finish drag with the mat.

Keeping the topdressing spreaders supplied with sand is one of the most important steps to maintain efficiency of the operation. Because of limitations on equipment or access, some superintendents must have the spreaders return to a central location, usually the shop, and haul each load out to each individual green. During heavy topdressing situations this can be very labor intensive.

Fortunately, those who were forced to use such measures tended to have small greens (5,000 square feet). Others with larger greens were able to support the effort with tractor-pulled dump trailers or in the case of **Don McCommon**, able to use a dump truck to supply the topdressing crew. **Chuck Blankenship** is able to stockpile his topdressing material in several satellite locations around the course to minimize the haul time from green to green.

The number one enemy of the superintendent during a topdressing operation is rain. Everyone tries to schedule topdressing only in the early part of the week so in case of disaster, there is recovery time before heavy weekend play.

My most memorable topdressing experience occurred at the Lake Buena Vista Club. We had been fighting the weather all week and on our last closed day, Friday, we had the topdressing spread and were dragging it in when we experienced a twenty minute thunderstorm. Holes 15 through 18 remained to be done. There was a 7:30 a.m. shotgun tournament the next day.

The superintendent at that time was John McKenzie. He got permission from the legal department, security, and loss prevention to rent a helicopter from over on International Drive. With John in the helicopter pushing air down to the green and me on the ground testing the dry-

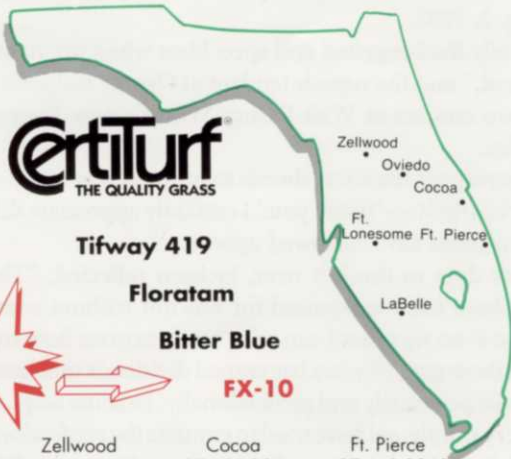
ness, we moved from hole to hole dragging in the top dressing as soon as it was dry enough.


Keeping mower reels sharp during these processes requires careful planning. Most superintendents keep a set of older reels available to mow the greens for the first few times following a topdressing application. Some may elect to not mow for a day or two following a heavy topdressing application. Some superintendents elect to redrag the greens the following morning to remove the dew and wait until later in the day when the greens are dry before mowing.

Summary

Plan ahead. Communicate with staff and members. Organize and prepare crew, equipment, and materials. Check conditions, materials and spreader settings. Check dragging results. Pray it doesn't rain.

DUDA SOD





Tifway 419

Floritam

Bitter Blue

FX-10

NEW! →

Zellwood 904-383-6111	Cocoa 407-636-3966	Ft. Pierce 407-461-0962
Oviedo 407-365-2189	Ft. Lonesome 813-633-1447	LaBelle 813-675-0545

DUDA
A. Duda & Sons, Inc.

1-800-FOR-DUDA

