

Managing Turf in the Golf Season

By Joel Jackson, CGCS

We are blessed or cursed with year-round growing conditions. While many northern clubs shut their doors during the winter season, we get to look forward to a busy golf season during our cooler months. Meanwhile, our native turf either keeps growing or, in north Florida, we sow seeds to grow a winter crop of cool-season grass if our turf goes dormant. In any case the turf must be managed to provide acceptable playing conditions while keeping any disruptions to the playing surfaces to a bare minimum.

In the summer months, it is usually easy to find time to close the course or at least nine holes to schedule some needed — but also disruptive — cultural practices like aerifying, verticutting and top dressing. In the money-making winter months, with all the increased traffic and often less-than-ideal growing conditions, we still need to do those same practices, but closing the course may not be an option. Certainly any procedure that detracts from suitable playing conditions for days on end is becoming even more unacceptable.

But thanks to improved equipment and products, flexibility and cooperation among the superintendent, pro shop and golfers, healthy turf and minimal effect to playing conditions is being achieved. Here are some tips and ideas from around the state on how to manage your turf during the busy golf season.

PUBLIC COURSE: WINTER PINES GOLF CLUB, WINTER PARK

Really we are busy year round thanks to our moderate prices and loyal customers, but play does pick up from Thanksgiving to Christmas — when it starts to cool off — and from January to May, we are wall-to-wall golfers. When it gets that busy, we don't have lots of bells and whistles that our six-man crew can employ to



Superintendents must adjust maintenance practices in the busy winter golf season to keep the turf healthy and golfers happy. Photo by Joel Jackson.

groom the golf course, so we settled on some basic practices that produce results for our needs.

After we overseed in November and the *Poa trivialis* is established, we attach brushes to our Cushman spiker for a once-a-week grooming of the greens. After January we begin aerifying one a month with 1/4-inch solid tines on a tractor-mounted Mustang Verti-Drain machine with heavy rollers. We use that set up on our push-up greens followed by a cleanup cut. Because we can't go as often as we sometimes need, we are considering testing 3/8- or 5/16-inch tines to see if we get longer compaction relief. On our new greens we use a Sysis slicer, which does a great job of relieving compact with little surface disruption. Again we do a cleanup cut behind the Sysis.

Whatever machine we are using, we start at 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning and go as far as we can with the greens and collar mowers behind us cleaning

up. It usually takes two mornings, Monday and Tuesday. We double-cut greens twice a week regardless during the cool season as a matter of regular maintenance.

Our only topdressing takes place after the three or four major aerifications and none during the cool golf season. Fertility during this time is also all foliar with approximately half of nitrogen going out with minors every two to three weeks depending on appearance and performance.

Joe Ondo, CGCS

PUBLIC COURSE: STONEYBROOK GOLF CLUB, ESTERO

Performing cultural practices on our greens during peak winter season at Stoneybrook is a definite challenge. We are a public facility, so our first tee time is 7 a.m., with most practices done in front of play.

I subcontract a pencil-tine aerification. They have the equipment

and manpower to do this with enough speed to stay ahead of play. When we lightly verticut and topdress, we will do nine holes a day. We do the back nine first, then start play on No. 10 the following day while we complete the front nine. This system has worked well for us, with few complaints. Fertilization is almost 100 percent foliar and ahead of play. We will do a granular 0-0-22 applications ahead of play once a month and water it in.

Matthew Nieder, GCS

RESORT COURSE: RITZ CARLTON GOLF CLUB, GRANDE LAKES, ORLANDO

We do not overseed anything on the golf course. We use fertigation to help keep overall color. We also lighten up on the intensity and frequency of our cultural practices, performing only light grooming, brushing, and topdressing on greens during the winter.

In the late winter and early spring, we needle-tine or hydroject to help reduce compaction from the traffic. We continually foliar feed to stimulate growth. During the winter, when needed, we will use turf paint to keep color, usually four to five applications per winter.

The obvious major benefits of our approach in prime golf season: No down time for seedbed preparation or seeding; no saturated conditions to germinate seed; and no over-watering during any warm spells during fall or winter. Normally we can maintain very good putting conditions October thru June when overseeding can pose many issues.

Andy Ragsdale, GCS

PRIVATE CLUB: ROYAL POINCIANA GOLF CLUB, NAPLES

Each Monday during the season we close the first hole on one 18 (We

are lucky to have 36) at 1 p.m., and keep that course closed the rest of the day. We get behind the last group and lightly verticut with a triplex, topdress lightly, carpet drag, spike with a sand pro/spiker and then add whatever amendments we are scheduled for.

The next day we have Ladies Day and we always have them play the course that did not get top-dressed. The men who play the verticut course do not seem to mind. They are used to it and, because we keep up with the thatch/mat, we do not have to go as aggressively. On the course that was top-dressed we mow the greens for the next two days with a Triplex so we do not trash out our walkers and save a little on labor; we use that labor to mow the other course prior to the ladies shotgun.

Years ago we started to use Ideal sand, which is very fine, during the winter months. It brushes in easier and does not cause issues days later.

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Get the Habit of Communicating



By Darren J. Davis

In keeping with the theme of my most recent Super Tips, “A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words” - Spring 2007 and “Words that Stick” - Summer 2007 the following tip addresses an employer/employee communication issue.

An excellent communicator himself, the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle taught, “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.” As all golf course superintendents are aware, instilling good habits or breaking bad habits in employees can often be a challenge. However, repetition is one of the keys to success and the following tip has been beneficial in the training and/or retraining of crew members in our operation.

The idea originated last year at the height of our busy winter golfing season. It was then that I worked with my counterpart in the pro shop to develop a series of messages aimed at educating the golfing membership on basic course etiquette. The messages were displayed in the information holders routinely mounted in golf cars. During the process a “light bulb went off in my head” and I asked myself - if

repetitive messages to the membership are beneficial, why wouldn't the same approach work on my crew?

I located the “Hard Plastic Information Holder” through Club Car (Club Car part No. 101808302) for approximately \$24 each. We determined that, on our Carryall Turf 252 utility vehicles, the best location to mount the information holder was on the dash just above the ignition key switch. The mounting bracket was secured in this location using two stainless steel sheet metal screws. Thumbscrews on the mounting bracket are then used to affix the clear holder. The thumbscrews enable quick installation and removal of the holder.

On one side of the information holder is an opening that accepts a standard 8-1/2 by 11-inch piece of paper cut or folded in half. The crew message that we display is usually changed weekly, and has included topics such as; keeping utility vehicles on cart paths, a reminder on hand-pulling weeds, safety items or concerns, motivational sayings, etc. You are truly limited only by your imagination on what can be displayed.

My assistants and I also use the information holders for our personal benefit. For example, I use the information holder in my vehicle as a “cheat sheet” for the hand-held radio commands for the irrigation system.

During a busy, hectic day, we all need reminders to get certain things done. This is one tool you might use to provide that extra communication when you can't get around to see everyone.



Since we aggressively aerify in the summer months we have not seen an issue with layering of sands. The course that has the off week is spiked on Monday morning ahead of the mowers, which causes little if any disruption.

In addition to the spiking on the course that is not being verticut, we also groom and/or brush during the week as needed. You can only really do this on the off weeks from verticutting or you will pull up sand.

Since getting on a 52-week Primo

program and the use of brushes, we have really been able to take the greens to a consistent level without peaks and valleys usually caused by fertilizer applications. We have also been able to keep the HOC up during most times of the year.

PRIVATE CLUB: SHADOW WOOD COUNTRY CLUB, NAPLES

We set up our event schedule during the height of our season at

Shadow Wood Country Club to provide for both member play and adequate maintenance time. Shadow Wood has 36 holes at our main facility, and 18 holes approximately 5 miles north of the 36-hole complex.

Starting in January, our offsite facility has an 8:30 shotgun every Monday. We are able to close this golf course following the morning shotgun every week. Our weekly men's and ladies' events are held on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and also are 8:30 shotguns.

We are also able to close these

golf courses during the afternoon, following these events. These closures are imperative to our success, because — other than these shotgun events — we do a 1 and 10 tee start on each course every day. During most of these closures, we are flexible enough to allow for several additional tee times if needed.

This all is dependent on what projects we are trying to accomplish. For example, if we are attempting to mow our rough, we can still allow 4 to 5 groups to go off No. 1. We start mowing No. 10 forward, and by the time we make the turn, the groups on the front are far enough along that we never run into each other.

If we are verticutting or topdressing greens, or applying fertilizers, we do not allow any groups to go off following the application for two important reasons:

The first is to avoid subjecting

our members to a lack of uniform playability due to the topdressing or verticutting process.

Second, we are able to make our material applications and water them in appropriately, minimizing any contact with our golfers. This is both for the safety of our members, as well as eliminating any opportunity for tip burn associated with driving a golf cart over the fertilizer before it is adequately watered in.

We do a tremendous volume of play at Shadow Wood, as much as any private club in our area.

Through a great relationship with our members, who understand what it takes to provide quality conditioning, and our Golf Staff, and Club Management, we are able to maintain healthy turf and provide consistent playing conditions and adequate availability of golf.

Kenyon Kyle, CGCS

PRIVATE/EQUITY CLUB: GATEWAY GOLF & COUNTRY CLUB, FT. MYERS

We have a two-hour gap in tee times every Monday from noon until 2:00 p.m. This is consistent Oct. 1 through April 30. The rest of the year we are closed on Monday as are many clubs. During the two-hour gap in tee times, we lightly topdress, brush and apply granular K religiously and lightly water-in. It is easy for us to stay in the time slot following the noon group around and finishing in about four and a half hours

During the winter season we do many different cultural practices.

We use pencil tines often, at least monthly, and walk-mow right behind it, then roll. The holes are virtually undetectable. About three days a week we use the brush attachments on our walkers. We have been using vibratory rollers for a couple of years with excellent results. We roll three times per week, occasionally more.



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At Gateway, we rarely verticut in the winter. (I can see the raised eyebrows now!) We get very aggressive in summer, and with weekly topdressing and brushing we find that grain is a non-issue for us.

Our Tifeagle greens are very good here. We are quite blessed. In fact we often get comments about the surfaces being too fast. This winter we are going to see how a height of cut at .130 does for us. Last year we maintained green speed around 11 to 11.5, and often quicker, on the Stimpmeter while mowing at .120.

Jim Phelps, GCS

PRIVATE: QUAIL CREEK COUNTRY CLUB, NAPLES

We have a pretty simple approach to our greens management during season. Every other week we try to topdress and fertilize with half a pound of N and 10 pounds of

Dolomite per 1,000 sq.ft., and spray a foliar fertilizer including Primo® weekly with a nice selection of minors.

We really do not get too much into verticutting after Sept. 1, but will do so in March when the weather heats up.

We do use groomers often when the grass is actively growing, which helps to keep us from having to verticut when the weather isn't prime. I used to use brushes before I had groomers on all my walk mowers but thought the brushes had a tendency to bounce when they became worn.

I make it a point to Hydroject all my greens one time per month from October to April and throw in a pencil-tine aerification in January for good measure. I also try to get in a soil flush each month heavily with a calcium product and a wetting agent. Last year I started using a product called Terrox (now the name has

changed to Agriox). It is a calcium peroxide powder that gives off oxygen as it dissolves.

We had a great year with really no bad areas on any greens and had to do very little hand watering. I made a comment to my irrigation manager last spring that I was pleased with the number of small projects he was able to complete last season and he indicated it was largely due to the extra time they had because they were not hand watering all morning every day.

I generally try to stay on a preventive fungicide program splitting applications between a contact and a systemic every two weeks. Last year was a bit different. We were hit so hard with leaf spot I sprayed almost weekly, more fungicide than I have ever sprayed before.

Dave Fenton, GCS

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