

RECLAIMING GREENS EDGES WITH CORE AERATION PLUGS

Todd Lowe, USGA Senior Agronomist



Aerifier plugs from the green are worked into the area where encroachment was sprayed out and removed by sod cutter. Photo by Todd Lowe.

There is a battle that takes place along putting green perimeters. The battle is over space and it occurs between the more aggressive rough-type bermudagrass (usually Tifway bermudagrass) against the green-type bermudagrass on golf course putting surfaces. This battle between the two turf types is generally termed “encroachment,” as the rough-type bermudagrass slowly encroaches onto putting surfaces over time.

There are no selective herbicides to remove rough-type bermudagrass from green-type bermudagrass putting surfaces and several strategies have been implemented to suppress encroachment including mechanical edging and using

alternative grasses within putting green collars. However, the most common means of managing encroachment is to physically remove contaminated putting green perimeters and to replace the turf with greens-type bermudagrass. This usually entails removing the contaminated turf with a sod cutter and simply replacing it with commercial sod. However, there are several downsides to using commercial sod including costs, excessive thatch, soil layering, surface grain and soil settling in sodded areas, creating uneven surfaces.

An innovative form of regrassing putting green perimeters was implemented for the first time at Quail West Golf and Country Club in

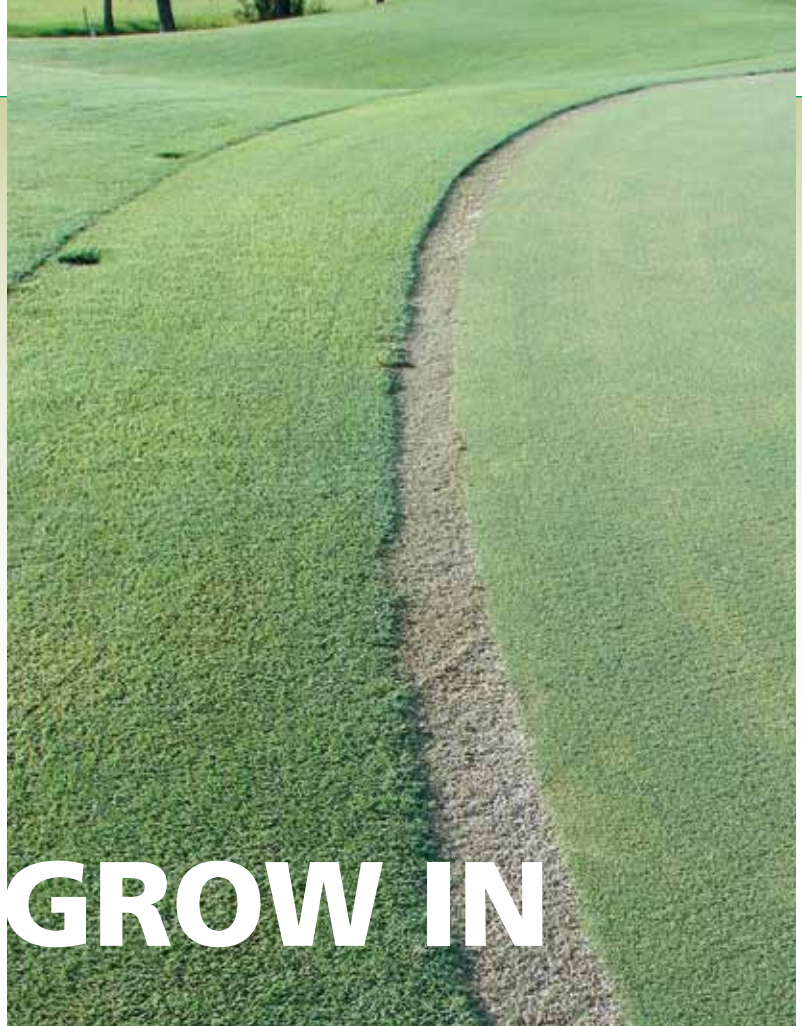
Naples several years ago. Contaminated perimeters were killed with Round-up (2 to 3 applications) several weeks prior to removal with a sod cutter. The cavity was slightly excavated and then replenished with a heavier rootzone mix (70 peat:30 sand). Putting greens were then core aerated (5/8” tines) and, instead of removing plugs, the cores were pushed into the new mix and rolled. The new perimeters generally require 6 to 7 weeks to completely establish and provide a much smoother and uniform surface than conventional sodding. Perimeter plugging also eliminates grain, since the plugs create a new stand of turf. Lastly, perimeter plugging saves money, since the grass is harvested on site.

HANDS ON

Mark Black, director of golf course and grounds operations at Quail West, and his staff have learned a few things over the years and offer the following suggestions:

- A pre plant fertilizer is not necessary as it gets buried under the plugs
- Try to install the plugs approximately 3/8" below the existing green edge and topdress new plantlets back up to the existing green surface. Wait until they are actively growing before beginning the topdress program
- Keep these areas moist, especially during the heat of the day
- Resist excessive rolling until plugs are established
- Do not turn mowers on the plugs
- Once you see root development, begin grow-in fertilizer program
- Do not spray Primo on plugs until fully established
- Spike as necessary

The area sprigged with greens plugs begins to green up and fill in.
Photo by Todd Lowe.



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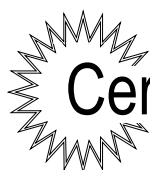
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Perimeter plugging has been successfully implemented on both golf courses at Quail West over the past eight years. Black has been quite pleased with the results although he credits the original concept to his staff and particularly Crew Leader Lacho Martinez. The plan is to plug perimeters every three years at Quail West, so that Tifway encroachment is kept at a minimum. In addition to plugging, the perimeter/collar interface is edged weekly during the growing season and Tifway runners are physically removed. Although this practice is labor intensive, it provides a nice look to the putting greens and another level of detail that golfers appreciate.

After six to seven weeks, the perimeters are completely grown in and are edged weekly during the growing season. Photo by Todd Lowe.



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