Sand Solutions

Finer-textured turf varieties are commonplace on greens these days and the old standby topdressing products and methods have had to change as well to accommodate good turf management. Higher golfer expectations also have required more attention to detail and esthetic considerations and the age of colored divot sand was born. But the tides of change ebb and flow and right now they're ebbing and cost is more of concern during these challenging times. We asked superintendents to chime in on the methods and products they are currently using.

Bill Davidson, CGCS, Country Club of Naples,

Greens' topdressing sands as fine as talc powder! I think this is an issue that came about in the age of ultralow mowing and trying to find a way to get the sand into the canopy. I used to mow my greens at .100-inch or lower and constantly apply sand and then pick it up with mowers.

Due to the dense, tight-cut canopy, a lot of people – including myself – started looking for finer, screened sands to incorporate into the turf to get the benefits of doing such. I was using sand called "ideal" sand. It is dried and screened sand. Now, with newer programs of mowing higher and rolling more, I no longer worry about sand incorporation into the putting surface.

I mow my greens at .125-inch year-around and no longer buy special screened sands in the winter months when the canopy tightens up. I use 200-seive sand in the summer and 180-seive sand after the last aerification.

Divot sand preference varies widely as well. I no longer buy the green-dyed sand because the green latex colorant used to dye the sand never degrades. I've dug up old range tees after 10 years of green sand being used to fill divots and the colorant is just as vibrant as the day the divots were filled.

Topdressing materials and methods are changing with the times. Photo by Joel Jackson.

In replacing the green-dyed sands, I use sand that has been blended with a screened compost to darken the sand. I believe the darker sand attracts more heat and thus stimulates recovery better in the winter, and the compost helps the sand hold more water and nutrients as well. I've heard of people using sand dyed black, but my fear is the sand colorant will have the same fate in the soil as the green and be around way too long.

My divot sand sizing is whatever they have left over to blend with the compost. It's usually around a 220-sieve size, but I really don't care. I just want as inexpensive a sand as I can get – the Celebration bermudagrass will grow through concrete.

Kevin Sunderman, Isla Del Sol Yacht & Country Club

We use green sand only for divots. It is straight sand with no amendments. I proposed using natural color sand in the summer as a cost saver, but the members vetoed the suggestion, preferring the green sand look.

Natural colored sand is used for all topdressing. I continue to topdress with straight sand that closely matches the greens mix in particle size. I emphasize a lot of big holes during aerification and do my best to incorporate as much sand as possible during this time.

While it doesn't eliminate the need for light topdressing throughout the year, I have been able to cut back these applications and still have a tight canopy that

doesn't scalp. Fewer light topdressings result in consistently sharp reels providing better cuts and healthier grass. Control of thatch and organic matter buildup seems to be better under this program than my older, more conventional program.

While the concept behind dark topdressing makes sense, I have only used one load with inconclusive results. My warmer location on the water may reduce the need for or significance of the dark topdressing.

We do not have the luxury of using dry bagged or silo-stored sand for topdressing. When topdressing during times of play we make sure to apply rates low enough where the sand can be incorporated with light irrigation, a greens roller or by dragging with a cocoa mat.

Ricky Reeves, Miami Beach Golf Club

At Miami Beach GC we use a 304 Maxand/Humate blend for divot filling and straight 304 Maxand for light topdressing.

Regarding colored sand: The way I see it all sand will layer unless needle tine or some other sort of incorporation is done with the application. I do not like seeing a layer of green sand in my greens.

For regular seasonal aerifications we use 304 Maxand to help hold moisture. Down south we don't worry about cold too much. I don't like the dark color for top dressing.

We don't use special dried sands. When doing light topdressings, we just get out in front of play and keep a good pace and water in if possible.

Due to budget restraints I may be forced to use different sand from what my greens were built with. It's a city-owned course and government seems not to understand the science, just the dollars. There are times I will use a different sand like a DOT 329 for better drainage and air movement when too many fines have settled in the upper 1–3-inch root zone.

Eric Ruha, Shadow Wood CC

We fill our members' cart sand buckets with green dyed sand of the 90/10 mix (the cart staff does it). We also use this sand on the par 3 tees and practice area divots.

We do not use green-dyed sand for broadcast applications on greens in the winter. We use Davenport or 150-mesh sand that is neutral in color, applied with a Widespin topdresser pulled by a small Kubota tractor. By applying it lightly two or three times a month, the neutral color does not make people say, "Wow, you used white sand!"

We also pencil-tine in the winter as weather and conditions allow. Topdressing lightly before this process is standard and then we roll-brush the sand in with a Salsco roller. We usually roll the next day without greens mower brush kit. We do not mow the next day. During aerification in the summer we use 180-mesh straight sand to fill holes. We typically aerify greens 3-4 times per course with 3/4″ or 3/8″ hollow tines to 4″ depth.

If we have stressed areas in the winter, (usually greens perimeter-cut areas or high traffic areas on specific greens with limited entry and exit points), we use dried, bagged green sand mixed with Profile®. This is applied very lightly with a rotary walk spreader. We have just purchased Maxand (sand) that is supposed to have coatings that provide plant benefits but we have not used it yet.