By Mark Leslie

Major improvements loom ahead in golf course green construction as soil blenders mix their imaginations and technology.

Quicker maturity and less disease during the grow-in period of a course are the biggest benefits as blenders look to adding fertilizers, micro-organisms and other materials into the root-zone mix for certain projects.

"The chemical and soil laboratories are the doctors and (blenders) are the pharmacists," said Troy McNeill of Transamerican Soil Blenders of Lubbock, Texas. "They write the prescription for the blending to fit a given golf course and given conditions. We fill that prescription."

"The future of blending is scrutinizing the chemical as well as physical properties of the soil," he said.

McNeill said the industry will see micro-organisms added to the blending process where greens won't be gassed with methyl bromide.

"Adding bacteria to the sterile media will help prevent disease and will push the green to maturity much quicker."

"This is extremely important," said Dr. Michael Hurdam, an golf course architect in Columbus, Ohio, who holds a PhD in agronomy. "The first one to two years, you get some weird diseases. You have a sterile mix (sand) and organisms can just move in there. Putting micro-organisms into the blend can significantly reduce that from happening."

McNeill added: "Maturity increases the productive capability of turf. It helps it to heal from spikes and compression ... and rounds played on the course is the bottom line — getting a return on the investment on the course."

"They can open a course a lot faster this way," agreed Christine Faulks of Greensmix in Waupaca, Wis.

Architect and builder Jim Fazio of Juno Beach, Fla., said this procedure would depend on soils and climate, adding he recommends putting fertilizer on top afterward in the South, "but up North it's a different story."

Faulks said products that are dry and free-flowing, such as water absorbents, can also be added.

"In Gainesville (University of Florida's Ben Hill Griffin Stadium) we blended in lime to help the pH. You will see different amendments that will enhance the root-zone mixture," she said.

Another "additive" of the future will probably be fibers for reinforcement.

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