

RIGHT IN YOUR OWN BACK YARD

A superintendent's solution
to turf repair might be a
course nursery

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Turf nurseries are often discussed, sometimes started and often discarded. It's an unfortunate sequence, for the turf nursery can be an invaluable addition to any course. Total advantages far outweigh the disadvantages.

Nurseries for tees and fairways are not to be minimized, because they do have a definite value. But most courses do not have the acreage, nor the money, to provide nurseries for all purposes. Damaged tees and fairways are not always easy to repair, but it is in this phase of maintenance that the golfer appears to be most tolerant. Greens present a different story. Putting surfaces are critical and even the poorest hacker expects each green to be the next thing to perfection . . . if not perfection itself.

Some sections of the country find buying sod for greens to be almost an impossibility. The sod either lacks quality, or it is prohibitive in price. Quite often it takes many miles of driving just to look at the right variety.

Losing a green, or greens, is never anticipated. This alone permits the nursery to serve as a solid form of preventive insurance. In most instances, the prime deterrent to building a nursery is the cost. But there are ways of cutting corners and getting the job done as economically as possible. The important thing is to recognize its potential value and then set goals for its productive use. A good greens nursery should never be built with the sole purpose of using it as a source of repair.

Where greens have become contaminated and full of problems, nurseries serve as a most effective method of upgrading. Naturally, this can't be an overnight process, and may take a number of years to complete. But, in the long run costs are reduced considerably and there is satisfaction in having control over the turf that replaces your present greens.

In the past, most turf nurseries have failed from lack of purpose and declining care. Properly utilized, there are few reasons why a good turf nursery should not return immeasurable benefits.

Construction of a nursery should be much like the actual building of a golf green. Excavation, tiling and

BACKYARD continued

adding various soil mixtures are all desirable but not absolutely necessary. However, using these components can serve as a source of valuable information. For instance, you may have doubts about recommendations for mixtures of soil,



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sand and peat. The construction of a nursery offers an excellent opportunity to test your beliefs against those of others. A variety of soil mixtures can be divided into sections by the use of heavy plastic or a number of other materials. Some authorities discourage the use of sod when the soil is not the same as the putting green. But, with very little thatch and a thin sod cut, type of soil should not present a problem.

If excavation and construction are out of the picture, don't discard the project. Good results can be gained in many other ways. Prior to starting a turf nursery, it is well to consider a number of points. The nursery should be located in an area easily accessible to maintenance and yet out of golf traffic. Water must be available at all times.

Land must be level or subject to easy grading after it has been cultivated. Although soil sterilization is not necessary, it does provide a number of obvious advantages. Excellent results can be obtained with methyl bromide or similar materials. When tile drainage is inadequate, the nursery should be built to drain naturally with a 3° slope.

To replace greens with sod, the nursery must have adequate size. On a nine-hole course it should allow for the replacement of at least two greens each year. Using sod to replace greens has advantages as well as disadvantages. With efficient cutting, placement and topdressing most greens are quickly molded into good putting surfaces. This has the advantage of keeping the green in play with very few complaints.

A disadvantage is the necessary rebuilding of the nursery after the sod has been stripped. The surface

should be cultivated, fertilized, and replenished with either stolons or seed. It is possible to let the sod cutter leave uncut strips, which gradually "fill-in". However, the rate of "fill-in" is greatly dependent upon the variety of grass. To assure a definite program of green reconstruction each year, the nursery will need as much help as possible. The addition of stolons or seed, with proper fertilization, will ensure the proper progress.

Greens nurseries can also be developed for the sole purpose of growing stolons. Although a nursery that is constructed especially for stolons need not be exceptionally large, it does require proper care. Mowing need not be as close as a sod green, but it must be close enough and consistent enough to prevent the formation of seedheads. Many hybrid varieties of putting green grasses are propagated by vegetative methods. When seeds are allowed to mature and fall to the ground, off-type grasses are very likely to infest the nursery. A tremendous advantage of the stolon nursery is its ability to perpetuate itself. With proper care, the addition of new seed or stolons is seldom required.

Establishing greens from stolons can be fairly rapid, or exceptionally slow, depending upon the variety of grass. Bentgrass in particular are painfully slow to mature into a good putting surface. Unless the green has been sterilized, *Poa annua* and other contaminants have an excellent opportunity to become competitive.

When stolons are used the green naturally becomes unplayable. The length of "down time" is dependent upon weather and grass variety. Thus, proper timing for the use of

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stolons can be extremely critical and should be planned for the convenience of the golfer.

Whether starting a greens nursery with stolons or seed, the same preparations are required. After the area has been cultivated, sterilized and graded, the final seedbed is readied with a rototiller or similar machine. An ideal seedbed is composed of particles that range in size from a pea to a marble. It is important that the soil not be worked into a powdery dust. When this happens, the addition of water often makes the surface much like cement. Before seeding or planting stolons, a starter fertilizer with high phosphorus content is necessary. The presence of adequate phosphorus is essential for the quick development of seedling grasses.

Watering equipment should be placed in such a manner as to keep the soil surface continuously moist but to limit traffic on and off the nursery. This decreases the chance of contaminating the new planting with undesirable seed and growth. Just as importantly, it could eliminate the spreading of what might be bentgrass from the nursery to surrounding areas of bluegrass.

Mowing should start whenever new growth reaches three-quarters of an inch and then be adjusted upward or downward gradually, depending on the type of nursery. In the sod nursery, height of cut is lowered until turf can be maintained like a putting green.

Fertilizer should be applied approximately a month after planting, preferably with a normal greens feeding. From then on the nursery is treated as an actual part of the course. Total maintenance includes fertilizers, fungicides, or any similar care that is applied to the greens. If conditions become necessary, verticutting and aerification may also be effective. Contamination, such as *Poa annua*, should be chemically removed long before the sod is moved to the green.

Stolon nurseries are generally mowed at about one inch. Like the sod nursery, stolons require a second fertilization about one month after planting, and monthly applications through the rest of the growing season. Regular applications of fungicides are also essential. Insecticides or other

products may be used as needed. It is also advisable to keep the stolon nursery on a frequent mowing program. Because of the style of growth and the need for many stolons, it is doubtful if verticutting or aerifying will become a major part of maintenance.

In contrast, to stolon nurseries, sod nurseries offer many opportunities to try certain fertilizers, programs or chemicals, and at least a portion of the nursery can be

utilized for this. Findings from your private tests may lead to better and more effective greens maintenance. It can also serve as a place to test greens mowers, sprinkling systems and other turf equipment. In southern areas of the United States, the greens nursery offers a perfect place to test overseeding varieties and mixtures. There may be many other ways the green nursery can serve as a source for valuable information and improved greens care.

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