Real-Life Solutions

NAPLES GRANDE GC, NAPLES, FLA.

Right as Rain

Water-absorbing polymer soil amendment helps superintendent solve landscaping irrigation woes

BY LARRY AYLWARD, EDITOR

When they began building Naples (Fla.) Grande GC in 1998, workers blasted caprock on the property to create lakes. Instead of hauling the busted rock off-site, they stockpiled it and later used it to build a 30-foot berm around the golf course. It was a great idea to get rid of the rock, but it also presented a difficulty.

The problem
After the berm was built and topped with dirt, it was landscaped with plants, bushes and trees. Unfortunately, the rocky berm, comprised mostly of calcium, didn’t have enough soil on it to adequately hold water in many areas. Poor water retention led to inferior growing conditions.

It was a battle to keep the landscape plants — including viburnums (hedges) and bougainvilleas (shrubs) — from withering away and dying. Naples Grande superintendent Gary Mull and his staff devoted a lot of extra time to their care.

“The plants began to suffer about one month after we put the landscape in,” Mull says. “We tried to hand water, fertilize and baby them.”

Nothing helped.

The fact that an appropriate landscape irrigation system wasn’t installed didn’t help matters. “We were relying on turfgrass sprinkler heads to maintain a lot of the landscape areas, but they didn’t work very well,” Mull says.

Viburnums require more water than turfgrass. Hence, the turfgrass flooded when the viburnums were watered. The bougainvilleas, which require less water than the viburnums, also received too much water.

Mull and his crew were forced to hand water and adjust sprinkler heads for proper watering of turf and landscape.

“It was a constant battle,” Mull says. “We should have installed the proper landscape irrigation system.”

After a year, several plants, bushes and trees on the berm were suffering or dying because of poor water retention. Mull knew something had to be done.

The solution
Jim Applegate, vice president of operations at Naples Grande, phoned a friend who operated a soil amendment company in Garland, Texas. Applegate asked his friend, Bobby Womack, president of AAdvanced Water Management, if he had any advice on how to combat the problem.

Womack had more than advice. His company manufactured a product called Hydrozone that helps in such situations.

Hydrozone is a water-absorbing polymer that absorbs 35 to 60 times its weight in water and later releases the water to a plant’s root zone. Hydrozone, a white free-flowing powder with little or no odor, lessens water loss caused by evaporation and percolation, the company says. When integrated into the growing medium properly, it reduces run-off by at least 50 percent.

Hydrozone is developed to have a limited capacity to absorb water so it doesn’t compete with the root systems for available water.

If you look closely, you’ll see Hydrozone globules attached to the roots. But Hydrozone won’t compete with the root systems for available water.

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Mull was skeptical of the product but tried it. He mixed Hydrozone with backfill dirt when planting new plants. He added it to the soil of existing trees. “We put it about 2 inches below the soil surface,” Mull says. “It’s simple to apply.”

Thanks to Hydrozone, the berm around the course is maintaining the plants.

A month later, the plants and trees thrived with new leaf growth. Mull says the viburnums, which dried out before, are especially vibrant.

Because of Hydrozone, Mull is confident the landscape can endure the searing sun and dryness often associated with the southern Florida climate. Mull says the product is pricey, but worth it to prevent thousands of dollars of landscaping from dying, not to mention the cost of the labor used to try to keep it alive. As Mull says, it costs about $200 to replace a tree and about five bucks worth of Hydrozone to keep it alive.

Management book
Ann Arbor Press/Sleeping Bear Press offers Turfgrass Soil Fertility and Chemical Problems: Assessment and Management, a single-source management book to help superintendents overcome fertility management challenges. Written by R.N. Carrow, D.V. Waddington and P.E. Rieke, the book addresses how to establish a sound fertilization program in a problem-solving manner that not only presents detailed scientific principles, but also applies them to practical management.

The book will help superintendents pinpoint the effectiveness of fertilizer programs. For more information, contact 800-487-2323, www.sleepingbearpress.com or CIRCLE NO. 201

Polymer-coated insecticide
Pursell Technologies says it has gained EPA approval for the first polymer-coated insecticide formulated with its patented PRECISE coating technology, which allows gradual release of pesticides through osmotic diffusion. The PRECISE Acephate Granule has substantial application technology. It works in every stage, either as a preventative application or as a curative control for adult insects. The product controls fire ant, mole crickets, sod webworms, cutworms, armyworms, chinch bugs and more.

For more information, contact 256-249-6888 or CIRCLE NO. 203

Endwall system
HartmanEW offers an endwall system made of plastic for a variety of drainage situations. The pre-fabricated Hartman endwall system is easy to install and requires virtually no maintenance. It has a hollow base that can be filled on site with various materials. For more information, contact 412-968-5774, www.hartmanew.com or CIRCLE NO. 204