

Real-Life Solutions

ARDSLEY CC, DOBBS FERRY, N.Y., AND THE LINKS AT ECHO SPRINGS, JOHNSTOWN, OHIO

Get Down

How can you get the green-up golfers demand while not damaging the long-term health of your turf?

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Problem

Superintendents must meet golfer expectations for quick green-up in the spring without sacrificing long-term turf health.

Solution

Find a slow-release granular fertilizer that combines green-up effects of foliar with long-term benefits of granulars

The demand to play golf early in the year has increased with the sport's popularity. Golfers figure they should be able to play as long as there isn't snow on the ground.

Even though they're playing before the winter chill has left the air, however, golfers demand turf as green in the spring as it is in midseason. But how can superintendents get the early green-up golfers demand without sacrificing the long-term nutritional needs of the turf?

The problem

The two types of fertilizer currently used in the industry — liquid foliars and slow-release granulars — each have advantages, but

neither gives superintendents everything they need to meet golfers' expectations in the spring.

Slow-release granulars keep greens healthier for longer periods, but the green-up is delayed. In addition, granulars are more likely to be picked up by mowers.

In contrast, foliars provide immediate green-up and are less likely to be captured by mowers. But foliar fertilizers are labor intensive and need to be applied more frequently to receive the same long-term effects.

George Pierpoint III, superintendent at Ardsley CC in Dobbs Ferry, N.Y., says it's a conundrum he faces every year.

"You hate to sacrifice the long-term health of the turf for the short-term green-

Superintendent Greg Wiles says he was pleased with Novex's performance after he adjusted his application procedures.

up," Pierpoint says. "But you obviously have to answer to golfers, so you have to find a balance."

Pierpoint heard about a new, small-particle granular fertilizer in February 2000 called Novex that seemed to combine the advantages of both. But because Cleveland-based Lesco didn't start mass production of the product until last fall, he couldn't find a batch to put down last spring, so he had to wait until July and August.

"I'd heard great things about what it was supposed to do," Pierpoint says. "It was supposed to be the best of both worlds, and I wanted

to see if it really worked.”

Greg Wiles, superintendent at The Links at Echo Springs in Johnstown, Ohio, had grown frustrated with other granular fertilizers he had used because his mowing baskets were always full of the fertilizer after an application.

“I was tired of putting down fertilizers and then picking them up the next time I mowed,” Wiles says. “I was looking for a granular that would get down to my turf where it would actually do some good.”

From what Wiles had heard, Novex might solve his problem.

The solution

Lesco allowed researchers at Penn State University to test the fertilizer early last year, and the product received praise for producing an immediate green-up *and* long-term results. In the study, the product received high marks for its ability to get down below the canopy quickly. The study found that one day after an application, mowers picked up less than .5 percent of the product, compared with over 10 percent for other granulars.

At the same time, the fertilizer provided a quick greening affect because of its active water solubility, the study says. In fact, it outperformed some foliar when it came to green-up.

Brian Rowan, product manager of golf fertilizers for Lesco, says the key is its particle size.

“We tightened our

size,” he says. “Water breaks down the outer layer and provides immediate green-up. But the sulfur coating helps it last for a longer period.”

Wiles says his first application of Novex produced impressive color — a little too impressive in some places, he adds.

“I saw a striping effect — darker green alternating with lighter green — where I’d overlapped too much,” Wiles says. “I learned my lesson.”

Once he adjusted his application procedure, Wiles says he was pleased with its performance.

Pierpoint said the smaller particles didn’t stick to his crew members’ shoes, which meant it didn’t track all over the course

Pierpoint says the product also doesn’t create a dust cloud around the applicant, which lessens health concerns surrounding its application.

Both Pierpoint and Wiles say they’re looking forward to putting the fertilizer down this spring. “As soon as the ground temperatures are warm enough, we’re going to put it on the greens,” Wiles says.

“We’re looking to expand our program to tees, roughs and fairways this year,” Pierpoint says. “We’re looking forward to similar results there.”

Rowan says the plant producing the fertilizer should be at full capacity — 75 tons per day — by the end of February. ■

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