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in his 15-year tenure thanks to an aggressive dethatching program.

"Members told me this year the greens are better than ever, and I think a more aggressive aeration has helped along with the more frequent, lighter topdressing," Flisek says.

He says he is able to topdress about six times in the spring and about four times in the fall, taking a break during the mid-summer heat. By September, he has the best greens of the year, so he lets members enjoy them by not aerifying until mid-October.

The late punch also allows him to go deep and alter his soil with more conducive material. His greens were built from coarser sand, and with the low mowing heights of today, he’s had to go with smaller material for his topdressing, which is typically taboo for fear of locking up soil with smaller particles. But with an aggressive 12-inch, deep-tine treatment along with a core process, he has a better chance of working it well into the composition.

"The newer, finer material is in columns down through the green’s profile," he says. "Now that we switched to the finer sand, I’m worried about having the finer layer on top, which is why I’m poking the deep holes and filling them with new sand before we do the core."

Flisek says he wouldn’t be permitted to upset the greens to that extent if he did the process immediately after Labor Day.

It usually takes him five days to finish the two-step process of deep-tine and core punching, but he wasn’t in a big rush in late October because golf at that time is a bonus.

“When we wait until this time of year, the members are more forgiving, and the grass is more forgiving,” he said in late October. “We won’t mow the greens for an entire week after we aerify. If you do that in September, you kind of get in trouble. Right now, no one really seems to care.”

It makes sense from a player’s perspective, considering September is some of the nicest golf weather, Flisek says. And it’s a vantage point he uses often. A five-handicapper, Flisek tries to play the course as often as he can with members of different skill levels so he can get a realistic view of what golfers think of the course.

“When I haven’t played in a couple weeks, sometimes I think the golf course is great. But when I play it, I see things that I would do differently, and we start to change things,” he says.
TOPDRESSING AT A GLANCE

With many courses donning a heavy layer of topdressing to combat desiccation and crown rot, many superintendents might not be thinking too much about topdressing protocols for next season. But a good regimen requires long-term planning of up to a year, especially for the composting phase, according to "Turf Management for Golf Courses" by James Beard.

Here's a planning checklist to ensure your material and regimen will keep you on target to combat thatch and keep your greens consistent.

| Make sure particle size is at least the size of that used to build the green to reduce the potential of layering. Otherwise, "it's like pouring BBs into a barrel full of baseballs," says Kevin Seibel, superintendent of Century Country Club. |
| If you must go finer because the existing materials are too coarse for the mowing heights, punch deep to allow the finer material to sit in columns through the profile. "It's important to get some deep-tine channels down through the profile so it's not one layer on top of the other," says Ken Flisek, superintendent of The Club at Nevillewood. |
| Particles should be tested for uniformity and composition; sand should be clean and have a high silica content. "You want a very hard material because you don't want your sand breaking down and plugging up your profile," says Rick Slattery, superintendent of Locust Hill Country Club. |
| Avoid excessive abrasions during hot, humid weather, which might invite anthracnose or other disease. |
| Work around rainstorms so the material works its way below the mower blades more quickly. |
| Tread lightly. You can always repeat the process in a few days if it was too light. Otherwise, "you might have to live with it a couple weeks. Sometimes it just won't go away. You can roll it, water it, brush it, and it still sticks around. It's a little trial and error," says Dan Williams, superintendent of Riverview Country Club in Appleton, Wis. |
| Consider a storage silo or a place to keep your material dry. "You are paying a premium for the process of baking and kiln drying, so you need a dry place to store it," Seibel says. |
| Know what you want to accomplish, says Sam Ferro, president of Turf Diagnostics and Design. A successful program requires goals, knowledge of physical properties of existing soil as well as the proposed topdress. |

— David Frabotta, Senior Editor

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Video games

I t started innocently enough. Just a boy at his aunt’s house, a block-shaped box of electronics, two straight lines and a bouncing, pixilated “ball.” The 1970s seem further away then ever, but the transcendent feeling of playing “Pong” repeatedly with my little brother has never vanished.

I’ve saved the world on Atari 2600 and won the World Series on Intellivision. I rescued a young lass repeatedly in Donkey Kong on ColecoVision and whooped Mike Tyson in his own game on Nintendo. After college I bloodied up Wayne Gretzky (I feel sort of bad about it now) on Sega Genesis, and took it to the hole on Iverson in the company’s later Dreamcast. Gran Turismo brought hours of relaxation on PlayStation during graduate school. Now, as an XBox dad, I still can skate with Tony Hawk and, frankly, kick Tiger all over St. Andrews.

Sure, video games have given me a false sense of athleticism, a penchant to think of the merge lane as an opening and turned me into a WWII hero. I know it’s not real, but man, are they still fun.

What is real is a $10.5-billion industry dedicated to giving folks like me — almost 25 percent of all home videogame players are age 35 or older — an escape. Also real is the holiday season release of sequels to Nintendo’s GameCube and PlayStation II. Before you drop some serious change to allow yourself (I mean, your child) to play with joysticks or Nunchucks (see below), take a minute to brush up on the latest. Keep in mind, we’re not in Pong-land anymore.

Xbox360: Released during the last holiday season, Microsoft got the jump on its rivals with its second-generation machine. The controllers are the same as the Xbox, but now it’s wireless. The graphics will drop your jaw, especially on high-definition television. It’s a DVD player to boot ($299 to $399).

PlayStation 3: Sony says the new system will be 35 times more powerful than PlayStation 2 and twice as powerful as Xbox360. While many liken the learning curve is steep. Ice for tennis elbow not included ($250).

Whichever system you or your child chooses, keep in mind that new games run about $60, and none of the systems come with two controllers. To beat the high cost of new games, don’t forget to check out the growing number of traditional and online stores that sell used games, which often can be picked up for much less. Remember, too, to play before you pay.

Happy holidays.

Mark Luce is a freelance writer based in Kansas City, Mo., where he still can’t figure out Halo or Halo II.
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