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shoes, except traditional steel spiked golf shoes, were banned on most golf courses.

From the nationwide ban of spikeless shoes in the early 1980s, the results of Dr. Gibeault's study were almost forgotten. In 1991, however, an ingenious inventor, who's name is not easily remembered, developed a soft, rubber spike. This spike could be used to retrofit all brands of steel spiked golf shoes. Unfortunately, it still took three years before this invention, known today as Soft-Spike, gave new life to the game of golf.

In 1994, the idea of banning steel spikes started grabbing hold. At the time, I remember being called an idealist for wearing Soft-Spikes during my travels and encouraging their use. I was told over and over by superintendents, golf professionals, and club managers, that until PGA Tour Players took off their steel spikes, the American golfer would never take note.

They were right. It was not until Muirfield Village Golf Course in Ohio, home of Jack Nicklaus, instituted a steel spike ban that the tide started turning. The ban at Muirfield Village finally got the American golfers' attention. When golfers from Ohio returned to their winter retreats in the sunny southwest, they brought with them "a new invention" for eliminating spike marks on greens.

Unbelievably, it was not until this year, when the United States Open returned to Pebble Beach Golf Links, that a major championship was hosted under a steel spike ban to preserve putting quality. It is hard to even imagine that major tournaments before 1999 could be won by a player whose putt was deflect ed into the hole by a spike mark left by a competitor. (Please note that the USGA does not officially endorse the sale of products by for-profit organizations. This agronomist, however, is an idealist who, as a golfer, is disgusted with greens that are torn apart by the time he gets to the course after work.)

Editor's note: See page 3 for related story Stockdale Goes Soft.

That Looks Easy
or Simple advice on how to make your home lawn look like a golf course.

by Bob Costa

One of the interesting aspects of being involved in the maintenance of a golf course is the questions people ask regarding our maintenance practices and how they relate to the care of their home lawns. What makes this business unique is that most everyone has, in some way, been involved in the maintenance and care of a lawn and, therefore, believes that they have developed a certain level of expertise. As a result, questions and comments regarding turf maintenance are at times a daily event.

Frequently I have people inquire about the establishment of a putting green in their back yard. A common question is "What type of grass do you use on your green?" As if the variety we use is what causes the grass to grow so short. After I explain that it is not so much the type of grass, but the height at which it is mowed, I follow with comments like, "you'll need a mower that will cut at less than 1/4", a new one could cost as much as $5,000, and the green should be mowed a minimum of five times a week." By now I can sense a general uneasiness, a slight shuffling of the feet, but I don't stop there. I conclude that in order to mimic putting qualities the green will have to be occasionally verticut, lightly syringed, and may require an application...
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of fungicide. It's apparent at this point that the living room carpet is looking like a much better option and the conversation usually dwindles to something like, "Really? That much for a mower, huh?"

Another question I am often asked is "What kind of fertilizer should I use? Every time I fertilize, I burn my lawn." I explain that burning a lawn is not the result of the material you choose, but rather the application technique, or lack of it in this case, that results in the call to 911. Most all fertilizers have the potential to burn because they are salts. To compensate for the salts contained in fertilizer, the lawn should be well watered prior to the fertilizer application, as well as after. It is equally important that the material is applied evenly over the entire area. Too much fertilizer equals a high concentration of salts, and there is no amount of water that will put that fire out. "That's interesting," they say. "Salts, huh?"

Then there's always the classic "How do I get rid of crabgrass in my lawn?" My response, of course, is: "Well, it's likely not crabgrass, but a warm season grass called kikuyu." I go on to explain that this is a variety that originated in Africa and was first used to stabilize the banks along the ocean. Kikuyu is very well adapted to the central coast and is virtually impossible to control once established. I suggest the most effective temporary control is to spray the entire area with Roundup, reseed or sod the area, and then count the days until it returns. A six-month calendar is usually all that is required. They mumble, "Africa, huh?"

I guess the moral of stories like these, if there is one, is that nothing is ever as easy as it looks, even simple things like maintaining a putting green, fertilizing a lawn, and controlling crabgrass. Next question please.

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