

Converting Maintained Turf To Native Grasses

Charlotte Country Club
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Issue

Charlotte Country Club was designed by the famous golf course architect Donald Ross and opened for play in 1910. Faced with increasing maintenance costs, the club wanted to reduce the total acreage of highly maintained turfgrass. Converting some areas to native grasses would reduce inputs and water use. It would also allow the maintenance staff to focus their time on the primary playing areas. After consulting with the golf course architect that had successfully restored the golf course, approximately 15 acres of out-of-play areas were identified for conversion.



Native grass areas make the golf course more economically and environmentally sustainable, they also enhance aesthetics.

Action

The club decided on a three-year plan to convert these areas to native grass. In mid to late August the target areas were sprayed with two sequential applications of two different herbicides to eliminate the existing turfgrass. The areas were then hand-seeded in early to mid-September with a seed mix containing fine fescue, little bluestem, sideoats grama, blue grama and Virginia bluestem. The native mix was planted at the rate of 3-5 pounds per thousand square feet.

Once the native grasses were established, the estimated annual savings of the conversion was \$1,250 per acre. Savings were expected to come from reductions in labor, inputs, and water.

Results

Converting maintained turf to native grasses has been very successful at Charlotte Country Club. The annual savings in labor, inputs, and water is approximately \$2,000 for each converted acre, exceeding the original estimates. The new native areas have also added to the visual appeal of the golf course. Consulting with a golf course architect throughout this process helped ensure that the new native areas did not cause playability issues or compromise the design intent.

Managing golfer expectations was an important part of this project. The new native grasses required at least one year to become fully established, but some golfers expected perfection almost immediately after seeding. Ongoing communication was necessary throughout the establishment process. Once the native grasses were fully mature, the vast majority of golfers were extremely pleased with the results.

The most significant challenge encountered during this process was managing traffic in and around the new native areas. For the native grasses to flourish it was important to keep traffic in the native areas to a minimum. An extensive communication and education effort was required to make golfers, caddies and staff aware of how they could help keep the native areas looking and playing their best.