



Managing weeds in naturalized rough can be tricky. Sometimes it's best to mow more frequently instead of relying on chemical herbicides.

MOWING NATURALIZED TURF TO IMPROVE PLAYABILITY AND REDUCE WEEDS

Omni Bedford Springs Resort | Bedford, Pa. 15522

David Swartzel, superintendent

ISSUE

The Omni Bedford Springs Resort features a classic-era golf course designed by Donald Ross. Ross commonly included mounds and hummocks as strategic features in his designs. At Omni Bedford Springs these features are planted with fine fescue that is allowed to grow tall, providing a natural appearance and visual contrast. However, the significant number of these fescue mounds made it challenging to keep them free of weeds, playable and aesthetically appealing. Weed contamination had greatly reduced playability and aesthetics in the mounding, causing guests to give these areas low marks. Superintendent David Swartzel recognized the need for an improved weed management program.

ACTION

The existing weed control program consisted of applying pre and postemergence herbicides in conjunction with removing weeds by hand when necessary. These methods worked for a while, but as weed populations continued to increase dedicating employees for removing weeds by hand became too costly. The decision was made to maintain the fescue mounds at a lower height of cut – around 5 inches – to reduce the population of weeds and undesirable grasses. The mounds are now mowed every two weeks with a specialized mower. This machine was selected after trying various equipment and mowing techniques, including using push mowers and string trimmers.

RESULTS

Mowing the fescue mounds every two weeks at a height of 5 inches has maintained the desired look and playability while reducing the weed population. The fescue mounds are key to the architecture of the course and now they are a focal point rather than an eyesore. Frequent mowing has proven to be such a successful method of weed control that chemical herbicides have been mostly replaced by the mowing program. Swartzel was able to eliminate three or four herbicide applications per year as a result. The course now enjoys some of its highest guest ratings in years along with a modest reduction in herbicide costs.