



## So, You Want To Have A Backyard Putting Green?

For golfers who cannot get enough of the game, a backyard putting green is the ultimate upgrade to a home landscape. A perfectly manicured putting surface conveniently located just a few steps away is a golf enthusiast's dream. While the ability to practice your short game in the comfort of your home sounds appealing, the expertise and equipment necessary to maintain a smooth, fast putting surface should not be taken lightly. There is much more to just building a putting green, planting grass and purchasing a reel mower.

Today's putting greens typically are maintained at or below a 0.125-inch height of cut – i.e., one eighth of an inch. To better appreciate how low that really is, two quarters stacked on top of each other would be slightly higher than 0.125 inch.

This is quite different than the turf in your backyard that typically is mowed at a height between two and three inches. Rather than the more familiar rotary-style lawn mower, a specialized type of reel mower is required to cut turf at low, putting green heights. A reel mower creates a scissor-like action where turfgrass leaves are clipped by the crossing of two cutting edges—the reel blades and bedknife. Rotary style mowers, which chop turfgrass leaves with a single blade, cannot effectively mow grass below a 1-inch height of cut.



*A reel mower, like this walk-behind unit, cuts at fractions of an inch to create silky-smooth putting surfaces.*

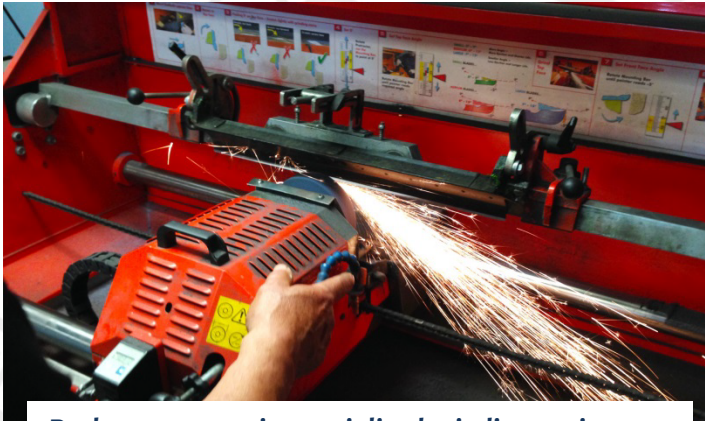
The ability to mow turf at very low heights comes at a cost. While a new residential, walk-behind rotary mower can be purchased for \$300, expect to pay upwards of \$9,000 for the type of walk-behind reel mower used on a golf course. Used reel mowers can be found at significant discounts, but they often require expensive replacement parts like new bearings, a new bedknife or a new reel cylinder.

A working reel mower is not the only piece of equipment one must have to mow at putting green heights—accurate gauges are vital to setting up the cutting unit for consistent results. Golf course mechanics routinely use dial calipers to insure the rollers of the cutting unit are true and minimize any variance in height of cut. Furthermore, dial indicators often are used to ensure mowing heights are accurate to the thousandth of an inch. What may seem like a miniscule difference can actually lead to a noticeable decline in putting quality. With such low



heights of cut and little room for error, these measurements and subsequent fine-tuning need to occur before every mowing.

Then, there's the issue of sharpening. Instead of having to sharpen a single blade like that found on a rotary mower, reel mowers used on putting greens have anywhere from 11 to 15 blades that make up the reel cylinder plus a bedknife that must be sharpened. This requires specialized grinders to maintain specific cutting angles.



***Reel mowers require specialized grinding equipment to maintain sharp edges and precise angles. Mowing with dull equipment reduces turfgrass quality, leading to bumpy putting surfaces.***

Despite the numerous challenges with having a backyard putting green, there are success stories. The keys to success are a knowledgeable caretaker and properly maintained mowing equipment.

To learn more about mowing equipment see:

[Managing Mower Setup to Achieve Quality Putting Surfaces](#)

[Webcast: Mower Setup Impacts Putting Green Surface Quality](#)

[USGA Maintenance - 1/100ths - What Does 0.01 Mean?](#)