



Make More Birdies By Controlling Organic Matter

Managing organic matter in putting greens creates smoother, firmer surfaces and helps golfers make more putts.

Do you want to make more birdies? Taking a lesson from your local golf professional will help your game, but did you know that golf course superintendents can also help you make more birdies? Giving superintendents the necessary resources and time to manage organic matter in putting greens creates smoother, firmer surfaces that help golfers make more putts.

Surface organic matter, or thatch, is a combination of dead and living grass shoots, stems and roots that accumulate just below the putting surface. If too much organic matter accumulates, it acts like a sponge and holds water near the surface after a rain or irrigation event. As a result, putting greens with excess organic matter are prone to soft conditions, deep ball marks, footprinting and inconsistent green speed that can keep your golf ball from smoothly rolling toward the hole.

Preventing organic matter from accumulating to the point that it impacts the smoothness and firmness of putting greens is extremely important. Management programs aimed at controlling organic matter can vary widely because the rate at which organic matter accumulates depends on turf species and growth rate. However, the most reliable management programs focus on diluting and removing organic matter, proper fertility and judicious irrigation.



Excessive organic matter can create bumpy, inconsistent putting surfaces.

Fertilizer and irrigation are used to keep putting greens healthy and actively growing so they can tolerate traffic. These resources should be applied to promote [playability and turf health, not color](#). Overwatered and overfertilized putting greens rapidly accumulate organic matter, leading to poor playing conditions and unhealthy turf.

Regular sand topdressing is crucial for managing organic matter. Light and frequent topdressing applications will dilute organic matter as it accumulates throughout the season, firming the surface



while masking imperfections created by ball marks and foot traffic.

Core aeration and verticutting are the most effective techniques for removing organic matter that has accumulated near the surface. Core aeration also helps address problems such as compaction, layering and poor infiltration. While core aeration and verticutting temporarily disrupt the playing surface, they are necessary to dilute and remove organic matter. Delaying or foregoing these important practices only increases the time it will take to correct future problems caused by excessive organic matter.

Golf course superintendents know that managing organic matter is a critical part of keeping putting greens healthy, smooth and playing well. If budget limitations and concerns about short-term disruption restrict a superintendent's ability to effectively manage organic matter, playing conditions will suffer. When superintendents are able to actively manage organic matter throughout the season, golfers will reap the benefits of smooth, firm putting surfaces by making a few more putts.

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Topdressing is one of the most important tools for managing organic matter and improving the smoothness and firmness of putting greens.