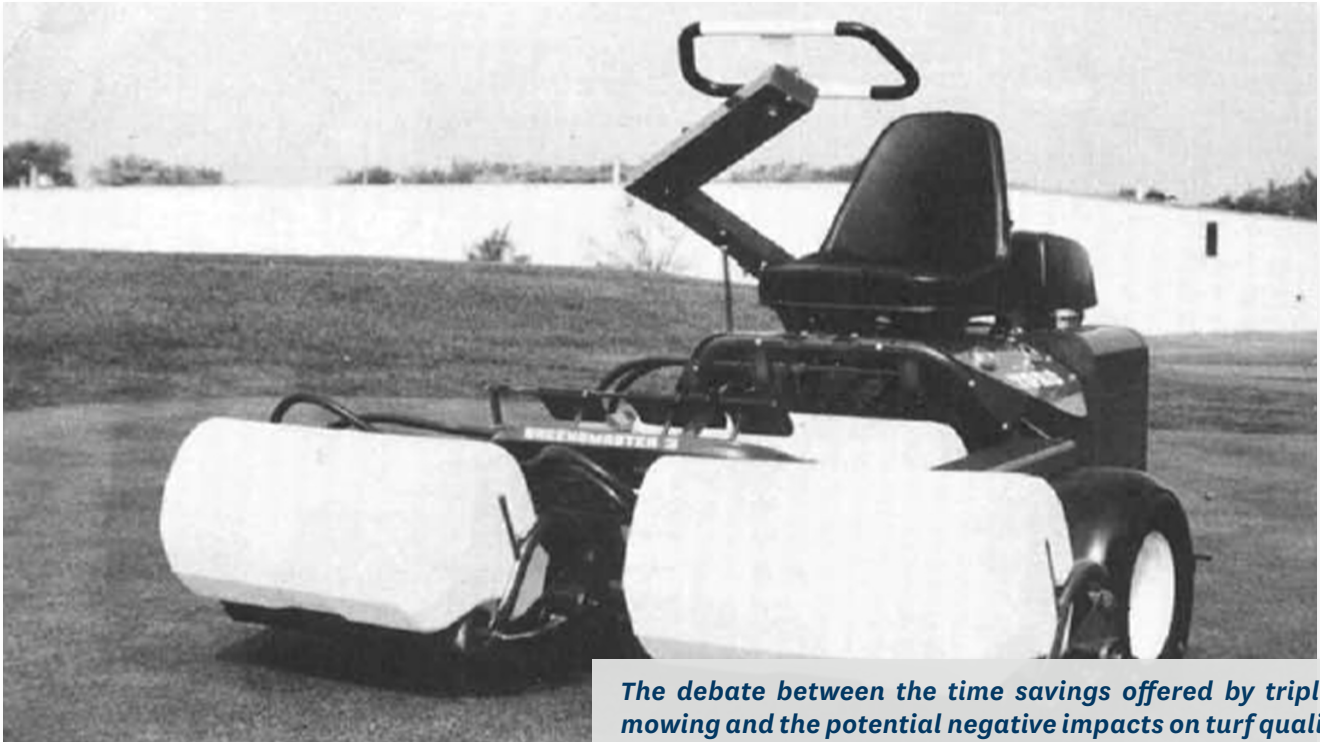


USGA®
Green Section
FROM THE VAULT

June 19, 2020



The debate between the time savings offered by triplex mowing and the potential negative impacts on turf quality has been around since the machines were invented.

THE GOOD AND NOT-SO-GOOD OF TRIPLEX PUTTING GREEN MOWERS

BY WILLIAM H. BENGEYFIELD, WESTERN DIRECTOR, USGA GREEN SECTION

USGA GREEN SECTION RECORD | MARCH, 1972

Editor's Note: Promoting labor-saving technology has been a part of the Green Section's work since its founding in 1920. Bill Bengeyfield, former USGA agronomist, national director, and author of many timeless articles in the Green Section Record, passed away in early June. It seems fitting to honor his contributions to the game by featuring his article "The Good and Not-So-Good of Triplex Putting Green Mowers", published in the Green Section Record in 1972, in this edition of our "From The Vault" series. You'll see a lot of common themes between Bill's article and the recently published "Triplex Tips for Success". That reflects the fact that good ideas stand the test of time. However, we are still waiting for Bill's vision of a triplex that makes fertilizer and plant protectant applications during the mowing process.

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Triplex mowers, although not new, are still in their infancy, and today's models will be tomorrow's curiosities. But for the moment, many hold doubts as to their present value if judged strictly by the results they produce. The problems of grain, wear and compaction are very real, especially if they are continually used on bentgrass greens in all kinds of weather. On the other hand, if you are the fellow paying the labor bill (which comprises 70 percent or more of the budget), the triplex green mower must be considered a godsend!

Some years ago, agricultural economists at Purdue University undertook a study to determine how much a farmer could afford to invest in equipment to save his labor time. If labor is worth \$2 an hour and if golf course chores are similar to farm chores, the tabulation would look something like this:

TABLE 1.

MACHINE SAVES	FARMERS CAN AFFORD
60 minutes per day	\$4,500.00
50 minutes per day	\$3,800.00
40 minutes per day	\$3,000.00
30 minutes per day	\$2,200.00
20 minutes per day	\$1,400.00
10 minutes per day	\$600.00

No wonder triplex putting green units have literally saved the day for many municipal as well as private golf courses. They are here to stay and the equipment is going to get better with time.

As increased labor costs have forced the use of more sophisticated machinery, the trend is undeniably toward more versatile equipment – i.e., being able to do more than one job. Triplex mowers already have interchangeable units for vertical mowing, tee mowing, etc. Fairway sweepers now have dethatching devices, etc. I'm waiting for the day when the triplex putting green mower will vacuum grass clippings (and *Poa annua* seed) while mowing greens, and then discharge the load automatically on the way to the next green. The mower could also be rigged to apply small amounts of fertilizer, fungicide or insecticide (wet or dry) during the mowing operation. What a labor savings it will be!

If progress in equipment during the past 10 years is any indication of the coming 10, we are going to see

more and more heavy machines used on greens. Early greenkeepers would have nightmares if they knew what we are doing and planning to do. Heavier equipment means more compaction, more wear, more grain, more thatch, more headaches for the superintendent devoted to quality golfing turf. And all of this is done in the name of “saving labor costs.”

Resistance to this trend is already evident among some clubs and superintendents. Quality playing conditions and appearance is more important to the game than minimum budgets. They hasten to point out that they, too, can mow 18 greens in less than three hours’ time with their sectionmen using the smaller walking mowers. And the sectionmen also fix ball marks on greens, touch up bunkers and overall, provide a finer, well-groomed golf course. They believe the time saved by triplex units is not all “saving.”

The controversy will continue for there are good and not-so-good points on both sides. Perhaps with time there will be a blending of views, a compromise. Manhours are the difference. But this difference may be found in using the triplex mower on tees and, on Saturday and Sundays, on the greens when overtime must be employed. In this way, labor costs can be held down and, at the same time, quality turf preserved.

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