# Keep a Step Ahead of Divots

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*Amending sand with a combination of peat and compost will help accelerate the rate of divot recovery.*

Soon after the snow melts, and often before courses open to play, golfers gravitate to practice tees to try out their new clubs. Many of today's golfers love to practice and usually prefer spending the majority of their practice time on the tee rather than in a practice bunker or on a putting green. As a result, a relatively unblemished practice tee can quickly become a moonscape of divots while the turf is still semidormant.

Spring is a good time to divert some practice to artificial mats. If artificial mats are not an option at your course, dealing with divots proactively will address the issue before significant wear to the practice tee occurs. Courses also should encourage golfers to Practice Like a Pro in a manner that creates lines of divots instead of a random pattern, conserving turf and accelerating recovery. However, even lines of divots require a certain amount time to recover.

A divot repair mix that holds moisture and nutrients will support seedling growth and divot recovery better than a droughty mix because fragile, shallow-rooted seedlings are very susceptible to moisture stress. Moisture stress often can go unnoticed during cool spring weather because wilting typically is associated with summer heat. Some of the best divot repair mixes contain 30 percent or more peat, which greatly increases the ability of sand to hold moisture and nutrients. Adding high-quality compost to divot repair mixes can further

enhance seedling establishment. However, the physical and chemical properties of various compost products can vary, so you should always test compost before adding it to a divot repair mix.

The key to successfully using compost is finding, and sticking with, a manufactured source that works for your facility. Manufactured composts have the best chance of providing consistent benefits from season to season. Be wary of municipal composts because the final product can vary each season according to weather and the composition of waste materials used during production. Always have a chemical and physical analysis performed on compost each year before using it in a divot repair mix. In addition, be prepared to screen out some of the larger particles in the compost to produce a material that is compatible with the particle sizes of the sand and peat used in your divot repair mix.

The dark color of a sand, peat, and compost mix warms up much faster than straight sand when the sun angle is low during spring, promoting germination and a quicker recovery. In addition, the ability to retain moisture and the presence of a little slow-release nitrogen are just what the doctor ordered for rapid divot recovery during spring and throughout the season.

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Information on the USGA's Course Consulting Service

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