



## Fall Aeration: A Look Behind The Scenes

By Chris Hartwiger, director, Course Consulting Service

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Fall in the South means footballs are flying, a much-deserved break in the heat is coming and core aeration is underway at courses with creeping bentgrass putting greens. Many golfers understand that the intent of core aeration is to produce better playing surfaces, but they may not understand the aeration tactics used by golf course superintendents each fall.



*Aeration is a valuable practice that removes unwanted organic matter and enhances oxygen and water movement through the root zone.*

- **Wide Spacing** – The root system of creeping bentgrass putting greens is at its weakest in early September. To minimize the potential for lifting and turf damage, superintendents typically use wider spacing between aeration tines in the fall than they do in the spring..
- **Tine Size** – Golf course superintendents often must decide which diameter of aeration tines is appropriate just days before aeration. Smaller tines are more appropriate for weaker, shallow-rooted putting greens while larger-diameter tines can be used on well-rooted putting greens.
- **Avoiding Damage** – The last thing any golf course superintendent wants to do is damage putting greens during the aeration process. The greatest risk for damage does not occur during the physical act of punching the holes, it occurs during core removal and sand incorporation. Both of these

practices are abrasive to tender bentgrass plants. Often, golf course superintendents will spread out the aeration process over two or three days to avoid performing core removal and sand incorporation during high temperatures.

- **Water Management** – A break in summer temperatures often brings a drop in humidity. Shallow-rooted putting greens with open aeration holes are vulnerable to rapid drying of the root zone. Golf course superintendents make it a priority to keep a close watch on soil moisture, adding additional water as needed.
- **Problem Areas** – Sometimes there are areas on putting greens that have been sodded, or will need to be sodded, due to turf loss. It is not uncommon for golf course superintendents to avoid aerating damaged areas until sod has been laid and is well-rooted.

Fall aeration is an important part of the season-long program for producing successful creeping bentgrass putting greens. Golf course superintendents deploy a number of strategies to maximize the success of aeration programs and minimize the disruption to golf.

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