

Overnight Practice Facility Tees

By Brian Whitlark, agronomist, West Region

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Turfgrass growth and recovery during the winter of 2010/2011 in the southwestern region of the country was slow due to colder-than-average temperatures. Compounding the problem, winter months in the Southwest often coincide with a significant increase in golfer activity, especially on the practice facility tee. Unfortunately, seed germination, turf growth, and recovery are sluggish, as night time temperatures often dip below 45°F and soil temperatures reside below 50°F. This is especially apparent on driving range tees when heavy play chews up the overseeded turf and often results in an unpleasant experience for golfers. If the practice facility tee at your course is small and cannot support the play it receives, golfers will find themselves searching for turf to hit from. Consider **synthetic turf** to relieve some of the pressure on the natural turf surface, or try pre-germinating seed to improve the performance of the practice facility. As an alternative, consider a sodding technique that is rapidly gaining popularity in the Southwest Region.

During a recent Turf Advisory Service Visit to a club in Scottsdale, AZ, the crew was busy assisting a contractor remove the spoils from about 15,000 ft² of the practice facility tee with an FTM 2000 machine. A video unit captured the removal process. Turf spoils from this area were removed and disposed of in



Turf on the practice facility tee is stripped at a height equivalent to the depth of the incoming sod. This method is an efficient way to remove spoils, level the tee and offer members a dense and cosmetically pleasing surface to enjoy when soil and air temperatures do not support active growth and seed germination.

about two hours. The removal cost ranges from \$0.09/ft²-\$0.12/ft², depending on the depth. The golf course supplied two laborers, a dump truck and an extra trailer for hauling away debris, while the contractor supplied the machine operator and one tractor and trailer. Also, two to three laborers are typically needed for one to two hours to clean the stripped area, edge around sprinkler heads, and fill any low spots for sodding. After the spoils are removed and the area is clean, big roll sod is laid at a cost of \$0.40/ ft², requiring no labor from the golf course. Although sodding is more expensive than seed and sand, the stripping process described in this update has several advantages:

- This process is fast – contractors can remove several acres per day.
- The stripping process can be set to the same depth as the incoming sod (usually about ¾-inch), streamlining sod replacement.
- The practice tee is leveled as a result – an entirely different experience than using a sod cutter.
- The spoils are often disposed of in a creative location on the course. When using a sod cutter, the sod rolls are cumbersome to handle and remove.
- Play is resumed on the sodded area within 4-6 weeks during the winter months, while the down-time for seeding would be 8-10 weeks.
- Sodding results in a uniform surface that resembles the fairways on the golf course, while the sand/seeded area often elicits complaints from golfers about hitting from thin, sand-filled divots.

During periods when soil and air temperatures do not support turf growth and seed germination, sodding a portion of the practice facility tee results in an immediate uniform and dense turf surface for golfers to enjoy.

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