

Four For The Price Of One

By Larry Gilhuly, agronomist, West Region

February 15, 2016

Every now and then an idea or concept comes along that makes one pause. Robotic putting green mowers are one of those concepts. Robotic mowers simply have too many positives to overlook and may become increasingly common as labor continues to be the highest cost for golf courses.

Robotic mowers have many positive aspects that can rapidly – i.e., within 2–3 years, depending on your location – provide a return on investment in many ways:

- **One person can complete multiple tasks.** – Those that have used robotic mowers report that a single person can complete up to four tasks while the mower completes its' task of mowing and rolling the green. Once the robotic mower is set up and starts mowing, the "operator" can fix ball marks, change the hole location, hand rake greenside bunkers and blow debris off the green. Once the robotic mower finishes, it returns to the exact spot from where it was programmed to begin.
- **Greatly improved efficiency before players arrive** – Employees that normally would be rolling greens, raking greenside bunkers or



Robotic mowers can allow a single person to change hole locations and hand rake bunkers while eliminating/reducing the need for a roller.

changing holes can now complete other tasks without being slowed or stopped by regular players.

- **Virtual elimination of future green reestablishment** – Greens tend to shrink over time, requiring periodic reestablishment of original contours. Robotic mowers have the ability to follow a guide wire buried along the edge of a green, providing the ability to maintain precise, original green perimeters. Also, robotic mowers can be programmed to mow a few inches inside a putting green perimeter to avoid constant wear in the same area.
- **Reduced wear damage to collars and nearby rough** – After observing a robotic mower in action, they appear to be much slower and far less damaging when turning compared to traditional mowers. Additionally, using robotic mowers virtually eliminates the chance of scalping collars. Finally, the turning radius of each robotic mower can be changed to further reduce turf damage to green surrounds.
- **Smoother putting surfaces** – One of the best features of robotic mowers is the elimination of footprints from the operator or triplex tires. This will result in smoother putting surfaces, especially during the early morning or when rainfall occurs.
- **Less chance of fluid damage** – As with other electric mowers, eliminating petroleum products like fuel, oil and hydraulic fluids greatly reduces the chance of spills that can damage putting green turf.
- **Quiet mowing that is perfect in a residential setting** – Many communities have noise restrictions, any form of electric mowing is far more acceptable than mowers with internal combustion engines. The lack of additional rollers and bunker rakes, and their associated noise, is another positive that will not show in the bottom line.
- **More emphasis on section maintenance and pride of ownership** – The *USGA Green Section Record* article, [Section Maintenance – It Could be Your Pot of Gold](#), highlights the benefits of section maintenance.

While the advancement and use of robotic mowers has been slow, the results have been outstanding. Is it the solution for you at your golf course? As Rosie the

Robot of The Jetsons' fame would say, "Everyone can use improved housekeeping."

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