



# Green Section Record

## REGIONAL UPDATE

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*Golf course maintenance has changed a lot since the 1980s. Here are 10 changes that have certainly improved turf health and playing conditions over time.*

## LOOKING BACK ON 35 YEARS

BY LARRY GILHULY | AGRONOMIST, WEST REGION

On Nov. 1, 1983, a blond-haired, former assistant superintendent at Seattle Golf Club began a career as a USGA agronomist. Reflecting on the past 35 years, there have been many notable improvements in golf course maintenance. The list is long, but here are 10 developments since 1983 that have truly changed golf course maintenance and playing conditions in very positive ways:

### 1. Golf shoes

The sound of metal spikes and the damage they caused to greens and clubhouse floors paved the way out for these Metallic Mashers of Monocots. By the turn of the 21st century, most golfers turned to the added comfort and grip of golf shoes with plastic spikes or even spikeless alternatives.



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## **2. Growth regulators**

Products that could slow down turf growth on putting greens were a foreign concept in the early '80s. Fortunately, since then several different chemistries of plant growth regulators have been developed, and they have had a tremendous impact on maintaining consistent green speed, reducing mowing frequency and minimizing clippings on all primary playing surfaces.

## **3. Putting green rollers**

Rolling putting greens was another foreign concept in the early '80s. Introduced in the early '90s, rolling has since become another important practice that helps achieve smooth and fast putting surfaces. Research has even confirmed that rolling can have little to no impact on putting green compaction.

## **4. Spin topdressers**

Thirty-five years ago, the standard way to apply sand to putting greens was with a small, walk-behind topdresser. These topdressers were great for topdressing after aeration, but using them to apply light rates of sand was difficult and slow. Large, trailer-type units soon followed, but topdressing was drastically changed when spin topdressers hit the market. Spin topdressers have sped up topdressing and made it easier to apply light rates. They also have opened a new door to fairway topdressing.

## **5. Aeration equipment**

Anyone that worked on putting greens in the '70s and early '80s probably remembers how slow walk-behind aeration units were to operate. New, walk-behind aeration equipment is much faster and more efficient. Fairway aeration equipment has also come a long way since the rolling-tine units with 6-inch spacings that were used in the old days.

## **6. Turfgrass research**

The USGA Research Committee was formed in the early '80s. Since then, the USGA has committed millions of dollars to fund forward-looking research projects that address critical issues facing the game such as water use, environmental stewardship, breeding new grasses and efficient resource management.

## **7. New grasses**

Over the past 35 years, turf researchers have developed many new grasses that provide better playing conditions and require fewer resources. Substantial progress has been with warm-season grasses including the development of ultradwarf bermudagrasses, seashore paspalum and new cultivars of zoysiagrass.

## **8. Precision sprayers**

Not that long ago one of the primary ways of applying liquid fertilizers and fungicides was with an orchard gun. Heavy utility vehicles with sprayers were seldom used on putting greens. The invention of small, walk-behind spray equipment provided a much more precise way of applying liquid products. Today, modern spray equipment is light years ahead of the equipment from 35 years ago. Advancements in application technology have not only sped up the process but also make possible near pinpoint precision.

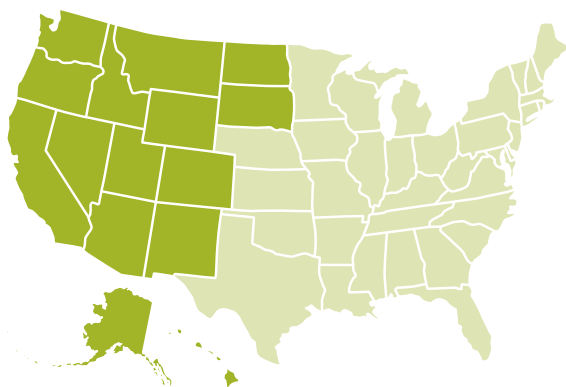
## 9. Porous bunker liners

Bunker washouts were quite common in the early '80s. Nothing was more discouraging than to watch a little rainstorm wash away the hard work that went in to preparing bunkers for play. Various types of porous bunker liners have been introduced over the past two decades, helping to put this issue in the rearview mirror.

## 10. Properly distanced forward tees

Although this topic has lagged over the past 35 years, it is finally gaining ground thanks to continued encouragement from organizations such as the USGA, the PGA and the ASGCA. Properly distanced forward tees simply did not exist in the early '80s. Although the tees at many courses still play too long for golfers with slow swing speeds, an increasing number of facilities are starting to install new forward tees.

Thirty-five years from now there will be many changes to discuss while reminiscing about the good old days, and I plan on being around to hear all about it!




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### WEST REGION AGRONOMISTS:

Patrick Gross, Regional Director, [pgross@usga.org](mailto:pgross@usga.org)

Larry Gilhuly, Agronomist, [lgilhuly@usga.org](mailto:lgilhuly@usga.org)

Brian Whitlark, Agronomist, [bwhitlark@usga.org](mailto:bwhitlark@usga.org)

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