

Planning around playing guests

Maintenance is up-to-date, and crews can do it all, as time is of the essence for Robert Mitchell and Greenbrier resort.

by James E. Guyette

■ At the Greenbrier resort hotel in White Sulphur Springs, W.Va., the guests pay plenty to play, and this presents a rigorous challenge for grounds superintendent Robert V. Mitchell. "We don't want to inconvenience our guests, so we have to work around them," he says.

The Greenbrier lies surrounded by 6,500 acres of lush gardens, three golf courses and a 212-unit residential housing development.

Each year, the 60 groundskeepers and gardeners use two tons of grass seed, 200 tons of fertilizer, 100,000 tulip bulbs (including forced bulbs for indoor use), 70,000 summer annual flowers, 10,000 chrysanthemums (with an



The Greenbrier's shrubs are grown along with a 5,000 square-foot Penncross nursery and a two-acre bluegrass nursery featuring five varieties.

added 2,600 shipped in from Kentucky for the recent Solheim Cup Golf Tournament), 7,000 poinsettias, and 350 tons of sand to replenish golf course bunkers.

They came to play—Some 60,000 golfers annually hit the links, and when they step up to the tee they have no desire to view a work-in-progress.

"Our guests by and large are here three or four days, and when they want to play golf, they don't want to be inconvenienced by bad conditions," says Mitchell. "They don't want to see the same conditions that they see at their home country club."

The maintained areas within the three golf courses consist of 200 acres of bluegrass/rye-grass roughs, 65 acres of bent/poa fairways, 568,000 sq.ft. of bent/poa tees and putting greens.

There are also two 11,750-sq.ft. regulation croquet courts with a special mix. And unlike a golf green, a championship croquet court (where the players wear white and keep silent during shots) must be perfectly flat with no lumps or bumps.

The resort's biggest months for guests are May, June, September and October, which means maintenance is tough. Each golf course is renovated once a year. One at a time, they are closed and renovated for a week in August.

"It's hard to grow grass in August," Mitchell reports. "I'd like to do it in September, but that's impossible." No work in the spring, either. "I'd like to renovate in the spring, but we can't because of the guest traffic."

So August it is, although even that month is gaining popularity as a vacation stayover. "I don't know how long they'll give us a week per course," Mitchell laments. "We try to do everything we can not to inconvenience our guests."

Greens speeds are maintained at eight and a-half to nine on the stimpmeter—faster for

special events.

Greens on The Old White and Greenbrier are walk-mowed; a triplex is used on the Lakeside greens. All three courses use lightweight mowers on the fairways.

All-round turf care—Embark is used for seed suppression in early spring. Primo is used throughout the summer to help promote an increase in bentgrass population on the fairways. TGR is applied to the croquet courts to deter *Poa annua*. Split applications of pre-emergence herbicides (pendimethalin on roughs and Dimension on fairways) are used. The black turfgrass atenius and the Japanese beetle grub are treated as needed via rotating insecticides. Fungicides are used on all greens, tees and fairways, and aerification of roughs and fairways begins in November.

The Greenbrier is in the upper limits of the transition zone because of its 1921-foot elevation, and it tilts toward the cool-season.

Much of the resort's grounds are covered with a "condo mix" that tolerates sun and shade. "We change that mix from time to time as better grasses become available," Mitchell explains. The current lineup consists of red fescue with Baron, Midnight, and America, plus Manhattan II ryegrass.

Tree time—Much of The Greenbrier property is wooded. "We have a lot of trees to take care of here." The consulting arborist is the Davey Tree Expert Co., and one full-time trimmer and a helper is on-staff.

There are about 20 Dutch elms to be cared for. "We climb them at least twice a year," Mitchell reports. "We try to keep ours as disease-free as possible both mechanically (removing sick branches) and by injection with fungicides and spraying with dormant oil."

—James E. Guyette, former editor of *Lawn*



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