

A QUESTION OF RENOVATION

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IN most sports both the playing area and the player can have a rest at the end of a hard season to recover from the bumps and bruises obtained during play. The player can attend the treatment room to iron out any physical problems while the groundsman can give his uninterrupted attention to the playing area. This ensures that both are fit to receive further bumps the following season. This is not so on the golf course!

The golfer is out on the course for 12 months in the year in hail, rain or shine and even frost, if given the opportunity. He plays on the same areas most of the year and at times seems to expect summer conditions in the winter. Repair work on the golf course is, therefore, subject to constant wear and interruption and the timing of renovation has often got to be amended to suit the fixture card. It may appear to the golfer, therefore, that renovation is another of those jobs designed to cause him some inconvenience and he will query the need for it. These questions and the answers are set out hereafter.

What Makes Renovation Necessary?

The need for renovation is caused basically by concentrated wear on a small area of turf and it follows that if wear can be spread over a larger area, then damage to any particular spot is much less. This point can be illustrated by comparing large and small tees at holes of similar lengths. The "postage stamp" type of tee will give rise to concentrated and heavy damage and major renovation work will be required. Small greens or greens which have only a limited amount of usable pin positions suffer damage in the same way.

In addition to those factors several other agencies can cause thinning out of the grass cover, bare patches or loss of surface. Soil conditions in association with weather can have a marked effect, e.g. over-acid soils show less drought resistance, poorly drained soils

may suffocate the grass roots hence affecting general vigour.

Even normal maintenance operations inefficiently carried out can cause damage, e.g. scalping with mower or chemical scorch. The former is often seen on banks and surrounds of greens. Disease can also severely damage turf if allowed to develop fully.

Further damage can be caused by four-legged pests such as rabbits or moles and even by two-legged pests in the form of vandalism.

Why Should Renovation be Carried Out?

As all the agencies mentioned in the first answer affect the density of the grass cover the basic reason for renovation is to restore a dense turf. Bare or thin areas are susceptible to invasion from weeds, moss and weedgrasses, all of which mar the surface. On greens in particular a true surface is required and while renovation is designed basically to restore the grass cover, improvement of levels must also be carried out.

Can Renovation be Eliminated?

The short answer to this question is "No!" However, damage can be minimised. On small areas some major rebuilding would be necessary to reduce the amount of wear, i.e. extending tees or recontouring of greens and banks. Attention to the provision of optimum conditions for grass growth may also be necessary, e.g. liming of over-acid soil, drainage or removal of excess fibre.

The other causes of damage can, of course, be eliminated at source by taking care when spraying, etc., and controlling disease before damage is done, but accidents do happen!

Where is Renovation Required?

Renovation in some form or another is usually required everywhere the golfer expects to find grass, including

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tees, fairways, banks, surrounds and traffic areas round greens.

When Should Renovation be Carried Out?

Ideally renovation should be carried out as soon as the damage is done but weather conditions, the demands of play and calls on labour mean that this is usually postponed until the autumn. There are, however, exceptions, e.g. turfing out of damaged areas before major competitions. If postponement of renovation work is necessary steps can be taken to minimise or reduce certain types of damage. Areas scorched by chemicals or dry patches which have developed can be hand forked and thoroughly watered.

Any seeding to be done is best completed by the end of September while turfing should be finished by Christmas.

How Should Renovation be Carried Out?

Renovation can be carried out either by turfing or seeding and the decision to use either will be determined to a large extent by general circumstances and the area to be renovated.

Wherever renovation is to be carried out in the autumn maintenance operations such as scarification and aeration should first be completed so that sub-surface conditions are improved and further surface disturbance is not immediately required. On certain parts of the course it may be possible to re-route traffic until establishment is obtained.

On greens where intensive maintenance is carried out and a true putting surface is required turfing is generally to be preferred and, to provide suitable turf, the establishment of a turf nursery is desirable. A turf nursery should be large enough to meet one's annual turf requirement for a few years in advance and maintenance should be carried out along the same lines as the greens. When turfing it is, of course, essential to provide an evenly firmed turf bed prior to laying the turf to marry in with surrounding levels. If any sinkage does occur it can then be top dressed out.

Where suitable turf is not available

seeding will, of course, be necessary. Sometimes it is best for the affected areas to be patched out using turf from the edges of the green and the edges seeded up. On completely bare areas complete overseeding may be required after spiking and scarifying. A seed bed can then be prepared using a rake and/or a spiked roller. On thin areas hand rubbing in of a compost/seeds mixture should achieve the desired results.

Where heavily worn tees have to be renovated in the autumn an alternative teeing area should be provided. Adequate preparation is essential to relieve compaction and provide a good level seed or turf bed. On badly affected areas levels may have to be made good with a sandy compost before seeding or turfing. On less heavily worn areas it may be sufficient to adopt the normal divot-filling procedure, i.e. filling up scrapes with compost/seed mixture, following up with an overall top dressing at a later date.

Fairways divot filling should form part of routine maintenance but large bare areas should suggest a possible need for lime treatment before seeding or turfing and soil testing may be required. Spiking also should form part of the renovation procedure on these areas.

Worn paths between bunkers and beside greens and tees are often accepted as unavoidable evils but in a high proportion of cases it is possible to re-route traffic, enabling some natural recovery to take place. Recovery can be assisted by spiking to relieve compaction, fertiliser treatment to boost growth and over-seeding to establish the more desirable grasses. Sanding or composting of these areas may also help to provide a drier surface which is less susceptible to damage.

Results from renovation are often variable due to weather conditions and ensuing use — most areas having to remain in play and having to receive general maintenance, e.g. mowing. As with all immature things, time is required for them to be able to withstand the rigours of play but time is at a premium on the golf course.