

The good news (for greenkeepers concerned about wear, tear and compaction) is that for the fourth consecutive year the proportion of new golfers (those who have been playing less than two years) is dropping. In other words, according to statistics released by Sports Marketing Surveys, fewer people are taking up the game. The bad news (for greenkeepers concerned about wear, tear and compaction) is that regular golfers are playing more. In other words, compaction as a problem is here to stay. Philip Shaw, head greenkeeper at Royal Norwich Golf Club, Norwich, gives his views on Golf Course Enemy No1.

Throughout the year, compaction occurs on golf playing surfaces. With the move by clubs to encourage play, there is of course a downside – compaction, a word often used but not always fully understood. Climatic conditions throughout the year play their part in causing compaction. Course type is another area together with varying soil type.

Generally, compaction occurs in all areas, and the outcome is not dissimilar in all cases.

To combat the ever increasing threat from compaction the greenkeeper must in his own mind be clear of the form this will take. Having assessed the best approach this must then be set against the availability of on-site plant. Often is the case that clubs engage the services of a contractor, or hire the plant for the job. At most clubs there is often some type of equipment to aerate, in some cases this may only be for the smaller areas such as greens etc.



Having assessed machine capability on site, then the option of hire or purchase has to be considered. The experienced have normally carried out such an exercise time and again. In some cases their requirements are met, however there are those who still see compaction and aeration as separate issues. For some reason the message never seems to get across, maybe it never will. Compaction is responsible for so many problems that, in turn, go on to affect the playing surfaces. Whilst conditions play a part in the timing of aeration operations, it is normally better to proceed in less than perfect conditions than to avoid this vital cultivation.

Many do carry out regular aeration, but there are those who continually are made to

feel uneasy and uncertain as to the reasoning behind this cultivation.

Clubs should be guided by their on-site expert, the head greenkeeper, but sadly his word is often ignored. Aeration is without doubt a cultivation golf courses cannot get enough of, and it is this message that requires getting across to all concerned with golf clubs.

Areas suffering stress during summer and excess wear during winter would benefit from aeration. Golfers, however, only see disruption; disruption that over a period of time will show less as the grass plant develops a deeper, healthier root system.

The need for intense aeration should be a number one priority when assessing maintenance programmes.

Aeration on greens by various means should be intensified throughout the more dormant months of the year. A simple way of looking at requirements of the grass plant is to compare with say an agricultural crop; after harvest the field is ploughed, allowing air into the soil and relieving compaction, deep compaction where relief is necessary, carried out by sub-soil cultivation. Amenity turf is subject to compaction throughout the year, movement of air and water through the rootzone is vital.

Verti-draining carried out on all areas on a regular basis throughout dormant months, together with, where possible, complementary bayonet or slit tine cultivation would do much to lessen the problems associated with compaction.

The fight to combat compaction must go on, this is the message that must be made clear at all levels.

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