



• Just a trim?

In this magazine dedicated to good turf maintenance practices, one word certain to cause an outbreak of apoplexy is aesthetics. By dictionary definition, aesthetic means "relating to beauty rather than to other considerations", though in golf terminology it has come to mean making the course look as good as it plays, or even better. A few still denigrate the process completely and regard aesthetics as nothing more than 'pretified gardening'.

Of course, in dealing with a living

entity and the vagaries of Mother Nature, practical considerations must come first, thus it would never do to impose aesthetic demands if they run contrary to good agronomic practice.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that today's golfers have come to insist on visual niceties of a higher level than, say, 25 or 30 years ago.

Televised golf must take some share of the blame (or credit) for player sophistication, though who among us, hand on heart, would not admit admiration and envy at the stunning appearance of, say, Gleneagles, Pebble Beach, or Augusta National - as shown on T.V. The thought lingers that save for the extensive budgets that go hand in glove with these verdant cathedrals, there goes every greenkeeper worth his salt.

Pride in your golf course will be an additional driving force; that satisfying though brief moment of egoism a reminder of a job well done, especially when a member saunters across and comments, "The course is looking marvellous today."

One particular practice, aesthetically pleasing yet available to all, thanks to the advances made in lightweight fairway mowers, is contour mowing and striping. It all started in the mid 1970s, when a US Tour event promised a wash-out after days of downpour prevented a tractor and seven gang trailed unit from working. In desperation, a Tour official asked if they would try using a greens triplex with higher blade settings. They did, the compaction was minimal, and the neatly striped fairways looked great on T.V. The

players loved it and the rest is history.

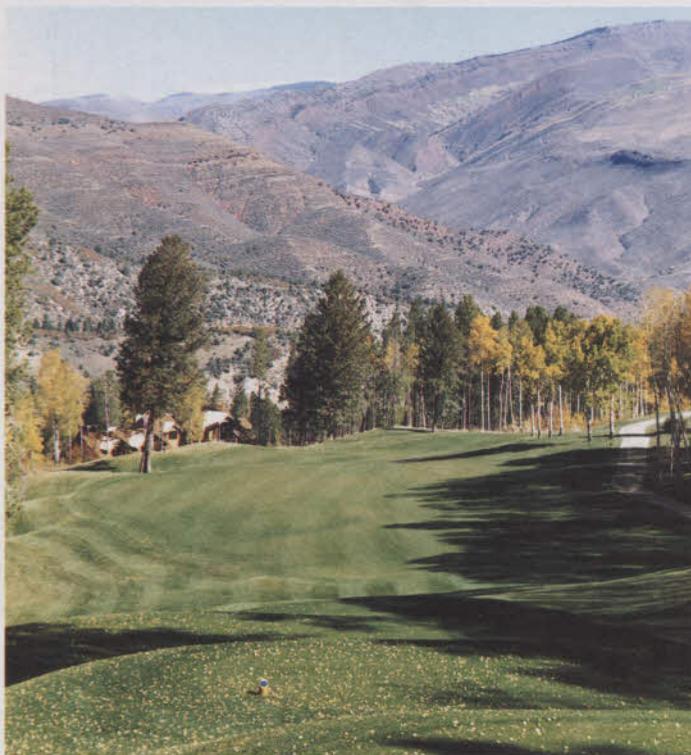
Swiftly adopted, this new fairway cutting technology really took off in the 1980s, for triplex cutting brought not only improved aesthetics, but with a markedly lighter weight machine came minimal compaction and a noted improvement in fairway turf quality.

Trendy it was, and the practice certainly worked, yet now there is hardly a triplex to be seen working on fairways. The reason is simple, for manufacturers responded by introducing lightweight multi-plex mowers, purpose-built for fairway cutting and grooming, coupled with the ability to closely follow ground contours without scalping.

The original thinking behind triplex cutting had not been overlooked, for with multi-plex mowers the beauty (and gain) is to be found in units that work at speeds well in excess of triplexes, while maintaining those same aesthetic qualities that first started the ball rolling - less compaction, a reduction in turf damage, a sharper demarcation between fairway and semi-rough, distinctive and improved cutting qualities and a marked upgrading in fine turf species. All this plus great striping effects into the bargain.

The whole business of striping and patterning brings out the best in greenkeeper innovation, with upwards of seventy percent of course managers now following some form of patterning. Most popular, while probably also the least complicated to perform, is striping by sequential direction, back and forth along the fairways yet following rigidly the contours

An enhanced visual effect is attained with eye-catching striping continued into the fringes



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Lightweight fairway mowers provide a noted improvement in turf, both in quality and appearance.

of each hole. Regimented straight up and down mowing, it seems, is buried alongside the horse-drawn gang and the scythe.

For reasons of variety, others have taken to cutting at cross angles; alternating and varying a 45-degree angle, usually twice during the week, with just an occasional back and forth and returning to follow strict contours at weekends. All agree that wide, sweeping turns at the end of fairways produce visually pleasing half-moon or peanut-waisted effects rather than boring straight lines. If there is a single secret, it is to conjure infinite variety in routing by experimenting freely, thereby ensuring that the mower doesn't cover the exact same ground as it did the time before. Quite apart from the beauty of it all, this is a great compaction saver.

Summer is typically the time of major tournaments, thus it seems appropriate to list some advisory notes on fairway mowing for a championship:

- A course should be set up to require accuracy as well as length. The narrowing or widening of fairways, which necessitates a change in mowing height, should be undertaken as long in advance of the competition as possible. Fairways should be maintained to provide a firm and tight turf. Fluffiness results in 'fliers,' or shots without much backspin.

- To decrease grain and playing against a mowing stripe, mow fairways at an angle against the direction of play.

- Locate the centre of the landing zone from the tee, and repair all unplayable areas from that point

going 45 yards forward to the green and 45 yards back toward the tee.

- Overwatering landing areas and approaches to greens will be perceived as tricking up the course.

- When mowing, use flags as directional markers for straight lines.

- Dew drag before mowing with a heavy hose to reduce bouncing and decrease the formation of clipping piles.

- When using two lightweight mowers, start mowing in the middle of the fairway landing zone and work in the opposite direction.

- Mow fairways as you would paint a floor. Start near the 1st tee and mow away from play to keep noise and interference away from the competition.*

Finally, a few words on fairway mower selection. A first priority must be to ensure the mower has ample horsepower, sufficient to cope adequately with your requirements, and if your course is a hilly one, plump for an on-demand 4-wheel drive option, which will eliminate wheel spin in damp conditions. Power steering, hand adjustments, fully floating cutting heads, verti-groom conditioning attachments; all will add to make fairway mowing a creative joy.

* tournament guidelines compliments of USGA Green Section Record.

