

Pound to a penny, a golfer will have some excuse relating to the tee's surface for a poorly played shot. The object of the exercise is to make sure that tee presentation is top rate. Roland Taylor takes a look at the many ways in which a greenkeeper can achieve this ...

Time for tees



Above: Preparation work goes on during the Benson and Hedges International at the De Vere Belfry

The dictionary definition of a tee is - a cleared spot from which the ball is struck at the beginning of each hole. It is the words 'cleared spot' that sound a discord when it comes to modern greenkeeping. However, this statement becomes clearer when taken in the context of the history of the game. Originally there were no actual tees and the rules stated that the ball be struck

from a given number of club lengths from the previous hole. Evidence indicates that formal tees first appeared in the records in the last years of the 1800s.

On many of the older courses, tees were down the list when it came to priorities and today this has resulted in a number of problems. They were not designed to accommodate today's

increase in players and demand for all-year-round facilities. Heavy traffic on a relatively small area plays havoc with compaction and this, combined with poor drainage, does not bode well for a resilient turf cover. It takes a lot of abuse. The design required a tee to be elevated and often no account was taken of mowing the banking which results in labour-intensive methods having to

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Below: Various attachments can be added using the cassette method



be used to keep them looking good. When it comes to mowing there are a number of choices, the most favoured system being cylinder mowing and collecting the clippings. A mower with a fairly high rate of cuts per metre is ideal and there are plenty of different cutting widths available to suit specific requirements. In recent years there have been a number of units introduced that use a basic power source to which either cassettes or attachments can be added. They're usually a choice of cylinder mower units with various numbers of blades plus the advantage of being able to fit other turfcare equipment such as verticutters, scarifiers and aerators. These machines



are ideal for tee maintenance as they can be easily transported with a range of attachments by trailer or utility vehicle. When considering this type of system, the important feature to look out for is the time taken and tools required changing from one piece of kit to another. Some only take less than a minute.

Dare one suggest that the roller propelled rotary mowers that are now available could be considered for use as an alternative mower for some tees? These have the added advantage that they also pick up any leaves or other debris. It should be pointed out that if this cutting system is used the blade needs to be kept very sharp. The rotary principle is suitable for

banking, either in the form of a hover mower or wheeled model. For very awkward areas it may be necessary to use a hand-held strimmer and the backpack versions are especially worth considering for these types of locations.

On large tees the fairway style of unit can be used, especially if they have collection facilities. There are a number of smaller triple ride-on mowers now available using either cylinder or rotary cutting units and some of these have been specifically designed with tees in mind, especially where banking is involved.

If new tees are being considered, how they are going to be cost effectively mown needs to be addressed at

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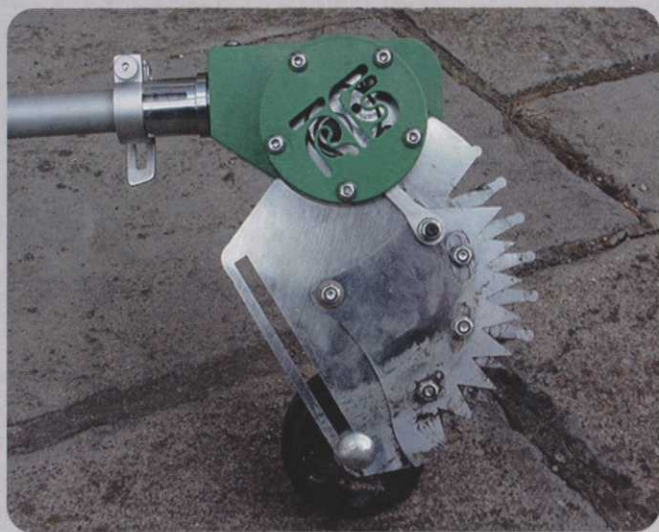
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Time for tees



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the point of planning. This will avoid a lot of problems that could occur after they have become established.

Cutting heights on tees is important, bearing in mind the volume and concentration of traffic using them.

The leaf cover needs to be kept high so the plants can gain as much nutrient as possible through photosynthesis. Somewhere between 6-13mm is the suggested scale.

Bunker surrounds are another area that will need special attention when it comes to mowing. Rotaries have already been mentioned in respect of any banking but often there is a lip or edge that will need to be kept trimmed. This could be done with a pair of edging shears but this is likely to be a long labour-intensive operation if there are a several bunker surrounds to be trimmed.

A number of edging machines are now available that would be ideal for this job. These generally use a vertical-mounted blade that operates in conjunction with an edging guide, either the wheels or rollers set to the depth of cut. As they are not self-propelled the operator can gauge his walking speed to obtain the best finish. This method of edging certainly speeds up the operation considerably.

It is easy to dismiss the role of tees. Generally they are the first sight the players have of a course, so their upkeep and general appearance are important as they say a lot about the rest of the course and how it is maintained.

From a golfer's point-of-view, the tee is the starting point of a trip into the unknown, certainly mentally and often physically. It is his introduction

to a particular hole, one that he hopes he will not fall into - his action can make or break what follows out on the course. Certainly on the first tee there can be an element of fear and trepidation plus there is often an audience of other players waiting to tee off. The tee is the one point where golfers cannot blame the results of their play on the condition of the playing surface. Why? Because the ball is on top of a plastic or wooden peg a few centimetres above the turf and the only time in the game when it is not in direct contact with the turf. Pound to a penny there will be some excuse relating to the tee's surface for a poorly played shot, so the object of the exercise is to make sure the presentation is top rate. There is plenty of equipment on the market to help achieve this, plus save time.