

PUTTING GREEN COMPLEX

Maintenance of today's putting green involves more than just the putting surface; it includes the collar, the approach, and the surrounding rough areas. Bunkers are not included since, by Definition 14, they are separate areas. Each of these areas requires separate maintenance, and yet each one is dependent upon the other.

The Collar and Approach

In 1974, the USGA Green Section, in its soil specifications for putting green construction, recommended that collar soil and putting green soil be similar. By inclusion, the collar was recognized as an important part of the putting green area and, as such, should receive the same careful preparation during construction and subsequent maintenance.

This is not to say that collars on greens not built to USGA specifications should receive less care and maintenance than the putting green. On the contrary, collars actually can determine to some degree the maintenance practices planned for the putting green themselves...especially water management. There is no formal definition of a collar in the Rules of Golf. Areas not defined are simply termed, "Through the Green." In common usage, collars are generally considered to be approximately a three-foot-wide area of turfgrass, mowed at an intermediate height between the putting green and fairway. However, collar widths vary. Some clubs prefer broad collars, while others maintain them relatively narrow. The choice is the club's and is usually determined by the equipment available to maintain these areas economically, the design of the green, and the distance the bunkers are situated away from the putting surface.

In the preparation of courses for USGA championships, the collars are 36 inches or less in width. Formidable rough is usually adjacent to the collar so that only well-played shots to each green are rewarded.

The Collar and the Rough

For most golf courses, a 4-to 5-inch rough immediately adjacent to the collar for regular membership play is too severe. There are compromises in the grass cutting heights for championships and regular play. Some turf managers and club officials believe that collars should be wide in order to ease and speed play. It is possible that just the opposite is true. For example, when a ball rolls over a wide-collared green, the ball will tend to continue to roll a greater distance from the putting green surface. Contract this to the same shot rolling over the green onto a narrow collar and stopping much more quickly in a normal rough area near the putting surface. The golfer whose ball rolled over the wide collar faces a longer chip shot. The golfer closer to the green should have a better opportunity to play his next shot close to the hole. This could mean fewer strokes and, potentially, speedier play.

Narrow collars with more rough around the green also can be better for the grass and easier and more economical to maintain for the golf course superintendent. It simply stands to reason that grass maintained as rough around the green has:

1. Better resistance to wilting.
2. Better resistance to traffic.
3. Better resistance to weed infestation.
4. Less disease and thus less chemical usage.
5. Better overall vigor and competition against *Poa annua*, especially in the cool season grass-growing regions where there is constant competition between Kentucky bluegrass and annual bluegrass. On the collar area, *Poa annua* is much more competitive than Kentucky bluegrasses, and it tends to dominate. Usually only bentgrasses or perennial

ryegrasses compete with the annual bluegrasses in the northern cool season turfgrass areas on collars. By narrowing the collar, the Kentucky bluegrasses will tend to dominate the annual bluegrass in closer proximity to the green. The result is grass that is better, stronger and easier to maintain.

It follows that relatively narrow collars with well-maintained rough areas are good for the game and good for the maintenance of the golf course.

Collar Maintenance

Collars are difficult areas to maintain. In many cases, soils under collars are of a finer texture, containing more silt and clay than the greens mixture. In new construction, collars have often been considered not as important as the putting green itself; therefore, they received less attention in the attempt to save money during construction. In our refined specifications for putting green construction, the USGA Green Section has attempted to correct this notion by recommending that collars be constructed exactly the same as the putting green itself.

This is fine for new construction, but many greens, especially on older golf courses, have not been constructed in this manner. This can be an important factor on older greens which have been enlarged onto soil areas that were intended originally to be collar. Enlarging greens in this manner was fairly common because of demands of ever-increasing play on small greens. As a result, unmodified soils which were never intended for anything but collars now have become part of the green. This makes putting green and collar maintenance even more difficult.

This all means that the collars on courses with heavier clay-silt soils tend to hold water so tenaciously that very little is available to the grass's roots. The turf on the green can be in excellent condition, while the collars have thoroughly wilted out. This situation is a particular problem in areas of the country where collars containing heavy soil, are compacted, and contain such high percentages of annual bluegrass, that they can die.

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