

Verti-Drain Aerification Preparation

by Bryan Wood

Preparation for Verti-Draining involves the same general good preparation practices as conventional aerifying. With hundreds of golf courses here in the Midwest now either owning or contracting the use of the Verti-Drain, I hope several of you may benefit from suggestions which we've found helpful toward achieving optimal results.

Healing time with the Verti-Drain is about the same as with other aerifiers. Many superintendents like to fertilize a week to ten days ahead of any aerifying so that turf is actively growing for quick healing of the tine holes. The Verti-Drain will give the roots a deep place to grow, but you still have to feed them. Remember to refer to soil tests for fertilization needs to determine addition of lime, sulphur, etc.

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Be prepared to use 1-½ tons of topdressing mix per 1000 square feet (straight sand weight — peat mixes of course weigh less). I recommend choosing a mix with uniform particle size that won't re-compact as easily as some mixes that contain everything from talc to pea gravel. Topdressing mixes vary so much in particle size, consistency, and density that needed amounts vary.

Because the Verti-Drain uses a pitchforking action to relieve compaction, solid tines are a popular choice over coring tines, and there are no cores to rake. You can change your soil profile by adding the desired topdressing mix when using either solid or coring tines. When using solid tines, many superintendents like to work a green ahead of the operator spreading about a ton/1000 sq. ft. of topdressing just before Verti-Draining. This helps dry out the mix making it easier to

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drag in. Plan on adding the remaining topdressing as needed to fill those deep tunnels the tines make, especially after watering in. Good common sense is a must when spreading topdressing prior to Verti-Draining. If it's raining, many superintendents take advantage of the moist greens and go ahead and Verti-Drain, but go back and topdress later with dry topdressing. And if it's 90+ degrees, the turf may "bake" underneath the topdressing if spread ahead of time, so topdress after aerating.

Frequency leads to best results with the Verti-Drain. Like any conventional aerifier, it needs to be used regularly to increase and maintain results. The severity of your compaction and soil-type problems will best determine how often you deep aerify. It's not unusual for golf courses with Verti-Drain to aerify with it 2 to 4 times per year.

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