



3/8" hollow tines taken from a putting green.

Gearing Up For Aeration

Another season is two-thirds over. There is only one last holiday weekend coming, which seems to bring the heavy play to an end. For most of us, this is a relief. As for most, I also look forward to the heat waves of summer coming to a close. High temperatures are not only difficult on turf but are also grueling on the equipment. Our projected rounds of play for this summer are close to 30,000. After supporting this play, it is time for us to help the turf recover. For our course and many others the week after Labor Day becomes hell week. Heavy aeration of greens, tees, approaches, and fairways is executed without disrupting play. Beginning on the Tuesday after Labor Day, from predawn to dusk, two greens aerators, two fairway aerators, a tractor driven sweeper, push blowers, a top dresser, drag screens, brushes, mats, utility tractors and carts, push snow shovels, fertilizer spreaders, and endless semi-loads of sand will all begin to move at the hands of our staff.



Aerification in process

As I look at the calendar, that week approaches fast. I always wonder if there enough time to prepare the equipment in between all of the other daily tasks. The last few years, I have begun to set aside time to begin preparations of each machine. This has made it a bit easier. I've learned that by marking a reminder on my calendar well in advance reminds me to think about hell week. I usually mark the first week of August down along with other important dates (tournaments, big events, etc.) way back in early spring. As these dates approach, I also start to refer to last year's notes. I use my notes as reminders from the previous year's experience. They always help to refresh my mind on what should be changed or added to the preparation of the equipment. Typically when the big week is over and the last machine gets put away for the night, that is usually how it stays. "Ridden hard and put away wet" is a line from a movie that has always stayed with me. It means the aerator, sweeper, and everything else that won't be used until next spring, won't be serviced anytime soon. I try to make "Ray Rayner" notes and stick them on each machine's file to recall incidentals that need to be addressed. I create notes such as the type and size of tines that were used, and how many did I go through during the day. One advantage, for me, is the tradition of the same equipment year after year. Another plus, is having the same operators return every season to use the same machines.



The sand man cometh.

Aerators and Tines

One of the first things I do when preparing an aerator is to check my inventory of spare belts, chains, and of course tines. I communicate with the superintendent to make certain I have enough of the desired tines in stock to complete the aerification process. Tines seem to disappear throughout the season when various areas are aerated. I don't want to get caught short and be forced to search for tines during the week. There are many different tines available today and it makes sense to try new ones, but a word of caution: Some of the newer, harder, longer-lasting tines when installed on older equipment can

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cause problems down the road. Some of these new tines do too good of a job transferring the shock load from impacting the soil through the tine to the tine holder to the arm to the connecting rods to the bearings and ultimately to the belts or chains. Today's equipment is built better with dampening systems that will absorb the blows that hardened tines will transfer. Keep in mind that the OEM has designed the machine for the particular year it was produced and tine it came equipped with, this translates to what will work and last.

Grinding Equipment

As aeration is wrapped up, don't forget about your grinders.

Though used throughout the season, maintenance of your grinders should be on your calendar as well. Their busy time approaches. I'm looking at a beautiful pile of top dressing sand and knowing the outcome and benefit that it serves for the greens, tees, and fairways, outweighs the aftermath to the cutting units. I know a major percentage of all that sand will pass through and destroy my precision ground cutting units. I know I will spend four or five consecutive days right after topdressing and then two to three more days the following week grinding cutting units over and over again. I will depend on the grinders to perform to my standards as always. However, prior to this

onslaught, I will take the time to remove covers, shields, and baffles. I will inspect the machines and pay attention to any components that show signs of wear. I have done this for many years, and have not had to replace much more than stones and guides on these often overlooked machines. I urge you do to the same. Each spring I am awakened by the first smells of cut grass and at the end of summer the smell of the soil pulled from the ground by an aerator begins the thoughts of a season ended.



How much sand do we need?



Even better than a Ray Rayner note – take a picture of the correct settings.



Good bye sand.



Readying the mowers again and again.