

Super Tips

Shedding Some Light on Several Situations

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When James P. Whalen, golf course superintendent at Calusa Pines Golf Club in Naples, accepted his current position at this nationally ranked club, he quickly realized he was “in the dark”... in the dark on some of his greens that is. Whalen, a graduate of Lake City Community College, has been employed at Calusa Pines since July of 2003. His prior employment includes stints at a few other well known clubs - Olde Florida Golf Club and Augusta National Golf Club.

When Whalen was hired, he was informed of a few greens that had been a challenge the previous season. After analyzing the situation he swiftly came to the conclusion that excessive shade created by several very tall, stately pines was the culprit, and the specimen trees would continue to pose a problem in the future.

Since removal was not an option, he went in search of other possible solutions. That's when Whalen turned to his equipment manager, John Patterson. According to Whalen, Patterson, an employee of the club since 2001, is his “go-to” guy. With their two heads put together, it did not take long for a light bulb to go on. The solution was grow lights mounted on portable towers.

The grow lights were purchased from Precision for just under \$600 and are attached to an aluminum pole that can be raised up to 12 feet. The pole assembly is affixed to a 4x4 trailer, also constructed by Patterson. On the bed of the trailer is mounted a 2700-watt generator purchased from



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Northern Tool and Equipment Company for approximately \$500. The fuel for the generator is supplied by a 6-gallon marine fuel tank also mounted on the bed. The metal for the trailer and pole was purchased locally for approximately \$300, bringing the total cost of the portable grow light towers to around \$1,400.

For one-person transfer, Patterson also installed hitches to the back of the trailers so that

they can be towed in tandem. Whalen preferred the portable, trailer mounted units to “fixed” units as they provide flexibility to move if other areas develop the need for additional artificial sunlight.

Whalen said he anticipates using the light towers from mid-November until March 1 each year. The light towers are placed near the shaded greens after golf play is finished and just prior to sundown each day. Although pleased with the results



The lights are powered by a 2700-watt generator with fuel supplied by a 6-gallon marine fuel tank, both mounted on the bed of the trailer.

to date, he is the first to point out that the grow lights are not a cure-all; they are just one of the tools in his arsenal. He also credits his success this year on the trouble areas to an intensive hand-watering regimen, limiting overhead irrigation use to an occasional deep irrigation associated with a granular fertilizer application. He feels that his foliar spoon-feeding program also played a role in keeping those shady areas healthy.

Whalen found additional uses for the lights that helped justify the expense. In winter - his busiest golfing period - the trailers can be pulled behind a utility vehicle with a greens mower trailer towed behind the light tower, allowing employees to get a jump on play by mowing a few greens before the sun rises. The towers have also been used to provide light for repairing late-night irrigation blow-outs. Whalen says he's sure other uses will arise.

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