

Practice makes perfect at home on the range

ON THE GREEN

NORMAN E. JOHNSON

A problem facing many golfers is finding a good place to practice. This is particularly true in rural areas where driving ranges are rare. Small-town golf courses are often nine-hole layouts with little provision for a practice area.

But there is a solution to this problem for many and you may be surprised to learn that having or sharing your own practice area can become a practical reality.

As a golfer who has always liked to practice, I solved the practice problem after we moved to our rural home. I discovered there was plenty of farmland in the area marginally suited to crop production. All I had to do was approach a neighboring farmer and things began to take shape.

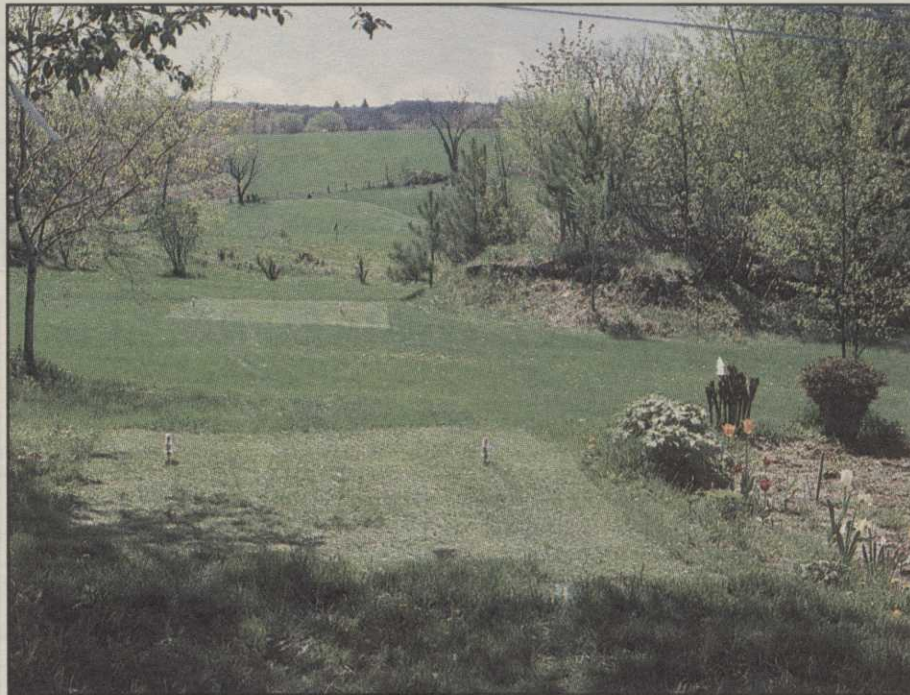
Part of a three-acre pasture caught my eye and I worked out a lease with the farmer to use the land for a practice range. I was doubly fortunate to find this land adjacent to our property and lost no time in grooming it to my needs.

Later, as a golf instructor, I found the practice area ideal for golf lessons as well as a place for others to practice. A serious golfer may want to locate and maintain his own practice area for a number of reasons.

For many it is a case of not having another place to practice. Others may be forced to travel farther than they like. But for the real student of the game, regular driving ranges often fail to offer a really quality practice area that benefits their games.

They may want better groomed turf areas, slopes and sand bunkers. You can also use your own golf balls — not the worn-out balls found at some driving ranges.

A great deal of personal satisfaction can be derived from your own practice area, too.



Norman Johnson has even added a landscaping touch with a flower bed at one of his practice tees. It's 'pick your tee or sandtrap' at this private range.

Equipment and range maintenance

With minimal preparation and care, nature will provide adequate soil nutrition and water to sustain good grass growth in most agricultural areas. This is particularly true of old pastures or fields that may have been abandoned for one reason or another.

Often fields with too severe a slope are turned back to nature or may have too steep a grade to crop farm regularly. These can be ideal for the golfer's needs. In any case, grass can be grown and these areas can be shaped as practice areas with a little work.

You may wish to share this venture with

other golfers, thus minimizing the cost and maintenance.

In most cases a common riding lawn mower will be adequate to mow the grass once the growing surface is properly cleared. Usually, little grass seeding is required as nature seems to provide grass or suitable vegetation as turf. Regular mowing keeps weeds in check as grass spreads naturally over the land.

Some soil may require fertilizer or forms of weed control that can be accomplished with common lawn maintenance equipment.

In my case, I looked around and found a

used, three-gang, steel wheel, golf course mower to mow my three-acre practice area. The price was right and I now own them. I pull these with a small tractor.

I find that mowing the grass once a week, clipped to about one inch high, is ideal.

The property never looked as beautiful as it does now. I even made up a nice sand bunker from which to practice. The \$70 annual rental satisfies the farmer, and I couldn't be happier in finding such a place as a driving range and practice area.

You may not need further encouragement to get started.

Norman Johnson is a freelance writer and golf instructor in Plum City, Wis.

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