

# ON THE GREEN

BY BILL ROLKE

"Gotta practice my putting game," you say as you step out into the backyard with putter in hand.

Fantasy, you say?

Nope.

Putting Greens International is making it possible across the country. It has developed a patented, artificial putting green that can give the serious golfer the opportunity to practice his approach game and improve his putting skills.

The greens can be contoured, sized and undulated to the customer's specifications. "Best of all," said president Jerry Carr, "these greens will need no chemical treatment, mowing, or upkeep other than an occasional sweeping when leaves and other wind-blown debris land on the surface."

While driving ranges are nearby most golfers, few have the chance to practice chipping and putting. Carr recognized this many years ago, but because of his experience in the lawn and landscaping business, realized a natural backyard green would be very expensive to install and maintain. And, finally, weather conditions would restrict play.

Carr experimented with various artificial carpets and turfs and found none with the characteristics of a natural green. He then opened negotiations with a manufacturer of

# Beatin' the crowds, stayin' home



Photo by Bill Rolke

Putting greens can be sized, shaped and undulated to the customer's desires.

artificial turf and developed a porous, padded, nylon product that when installed over a foundation of crushed stone and top-dressed with a special sand, resulted in a green with a Stimpmeter value of 10.

After a year-and-a-half of testing the finalized product under actual use, Putting Greens International installed a demonstration green at the 1990 Indianapolis Annual Spring Flower and Garden Show.

It was an instant success, drawing crowds morning to night for the eight days. A number of orders also came in.

Serious golfers were impressed by:

- the modest cost (\$3,500 average) for a 15- by 25-foot practice green;
- its low maintenance;
- it can be almost any shape, size and pitch;
- it is unharmed by insects, animals or children at play;
- it is non-fading, unaffected by heat or cold, and has an expected 12- to 15-year life; and
- it can be used immediately after a hard frost or heavy rain.

Using it for outdoor entertainment of guests is yet another plus factor.

Other market areas for the putting greens have been untapped. Hotels and motels are interested in installing them to attract guests, much as swimming pools are used.

Similarly, apartment and condominium complexes and retirement homes are considering them. Some practice driving ranges are also considering installing the greens so golfers can practice their total game at one location.

The artificial greens are not being considered as substitutes for regular gold course greens.

In fact, Carr felt installations at courses would occur only where managers want to offer a practice green for use when the natural greens are closed due to weather or maintenance.

After a year of installing greens in central Indiana, Putting Greens International is moving into the national market. Through shows, meetings and video programs, it is offering the concept to landscape companies.

Dealers will be taught how to install the greens and provided with the patented turf materials.

As soon as the national market is in place, Putting Greens plans to move into the international market. Japan may be the first target. The Japanese are avid golfers, but have limited opportunities to play due to extended waiting periods at public courses and exorbitant club membership fees. As a result, the average Japanese golfer spends most of his golfing time at driving ranges.

Installation of adjacent putting greens would help satisfy the Japanese golfers' quest for a balanced golfing experience, Carr reasons.

What comes after Japan?

"Well," Carr said, "I've always wanted to see Australia."

Bill Rolke is a freelance writer based in Columbus, Ind.

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