

# Soil blending a fitting expense in high-tech construction

By HAL PHILLIPS

With golf course construction costs climbing well into the millions of dollars, it's interesting that soil blending remains something of a luxury process. Yet as the golf industry becomes more and more sophisticated — and green construction becomes more and more expensive — soil blending may become a necessity.

The advantages are clear: complete uniformity and high quality. Considering it may cost \$300,000 to build 18 greens, shelling out

\$20,000 on proper soil-blending procedures is the proverbial "drop in the bucket."

Yet when it comes to deciding whether to retain soil-blending services, what takes precedence — cost or quality? Architects make the recommendations, but is that decision based purely on budgetary considerations?

"One thing we don't skimp on is that mix," said Tom Clark, partner in the firm of Ault, Clark & Associates, Ltd. "The owners realize they need to get the proper greens mix, so they don't have to go back and rebuild them. It's happened. There were times when layering and all kinds of problems have cropped

up. Now that's expensive."

Architect Dick Nugent, another soil blending enthusiast, likes the fact that blenders aren't feeling their way around.

"The people who do this work are doing it all the time, which is a plus. They're experts," said Nugent. "It's a judgment call, but I think it gives you a better product, better quality. If I have a choice, I want to work it into my budget."

Nugent points out that, while architects often decide whether to go the blending route, builders and contractors must deal directly with soil blending.

"From an architect's standpoint, the product is excellent," he explained. "But from a contractor's standpoint, it may be more expensive and it may mean a loss of control."

"The contractor also has to worry about practical things. Does he have a suitable place to mix the stuff by himself? Where's he supposed to do it? In the parking lot?"

"You don't have to worry about that with blenders."

Dr. Michael Hurdzan, principal of Hurdzan Design Group, can't say enough about the technology, which makes for superior blends

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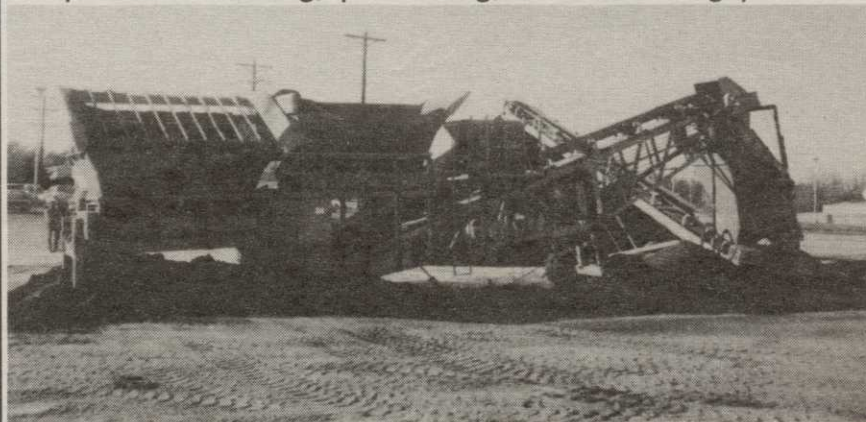


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## Tee To Green builder blessed using his own soil blender

About five months ago, Steve Hutchison of Tee To Green Golf Course Construction took the plunge and purchased a Model 2200 soil blender from Dakota Peat. His life is simpler, he says, and his product is better.

"It's been great," Hutchison reports. "We really like the control we get with the blender. And we know we're not going to have any trouble with these greens down the road."

Hutchison, whose company is currently working on three courses, said the elimination of contracted soil-blending services has already brought increased simplicity and savings.

Yet his recent purchase has also resulted in peace of mind.

"The part I don't like about contracting out is I don't feel comfortable turning over something so important to a subcontractor," he says. "The assurance of quality is very important. The blender is just one more tool that assures me of the quality I must have to be competitive."

The addition of in-house soil-

blending capability has created additional business opportunities for Tee To Green in the sport turf industry.

"The blender has really opened some doors," he says. "If I can blend it and quality control it to exact specification, I have a leg up."

So, Hutchison is a satisfied customer?

"Very much so."

## Soil blending in high-tech world

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and allows the addition of micro-nutrients and bio-amendments.

"First of all," said Hurdzan, "I think the soil blender has been the first major breakthrough in green construction in 50 years. The accuracy can't be matched."

"But if the contractor doesn't own a soil blender, and you have to contract it, and the blender doesn't get there on time, you're stuck. I think the mix changes while it's being stockpiled. It breaks down because the infiltration rate is half what it was."

Further, there are many builders — count John Cotter of Wadsworth Construction among them — who believe the process isn't essential. Cotter explained that Wadsworth still does the majority of its blending via the old front-loader method.

"The idea of soil blending was sold on accuracy, but our continuing tests show they're not that different," Cotter said. "We've been able to achieve a proper mix, backed up by testing, without using a soil blender. We obviously believe that both processes are effective."

Clark disagrees: "I think it's one of the most important aspects of building quality putting greens. We've spent a lot of time researching the proper mix, and we want to get it right."

Nugent suggests you seek out an informed reference.

"Call a superintendent whose greens were blended and ask him, 'Hey, you're living with this stuff. How is it?'"

"He'll tell you. It's a question of quality."

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