

Bubble Covers bring extraordinary results

Continued from page 19

"This was effective in most cases, but was time-consuming, and removal was also very time-consuming," he said. "But the main problem is, it's a living material... Also, in a mild winter, the greens did not come out so well."

Gauthier and his colleagues in the Northern regions considered that a perfect method of winter greens protection would include:

- control of water;
- isolation, such as an inorganic temperature buffer;
- ease of installation.

When a Bubble Cover salesman knocked on his door in late 1995, Gauthier jumped on the idea. "I knew it would be perfect," he recalled.

The product is sold from 4- to 28-foot widths, and Gauthier spent \$26,400 at 11 cents per square foot. He figures the Bubble Covers, which should be usable for at least six years, will save \$5,336 or more per year.

Using straw cost \$7,000 per year for the straw and \$4,560 in labor and disposal costs. The Bubble Cover costs only \$1,824 in labor, and the \$26,400 spread over six years equals \$4,400.

Gauthier spelled out the process of covering his greens with the bubble material, which is so strong the bubbles do not pop even when jumped upon.

First, the plastic netting is laid over the green. Mouse repellent is sprayed over the green. The Bubble Cover is spread out over the netting and is clamped down with long, fluorescent-pink staples so they can be easily found come spring. All this is held down by a permeable greens cover.

"This top cover," he said, "is very important and we have to pull it all the way back from the green. If not clamped down well, wind will tear it out."

In his experiments Gauthier placed household heat monitors inside the greens, with a sensor near the middle of the green and the monitor in a Ziploc bag at the edge of the green.



Crew member Daniel Fassina nails down the cover over one of the greens at Islesmere Golf & Country Club.

'The method is not perfect. Sometimes water infiltrates under the cover. But we are fine-tuning it. We are pulling the top cover even more taut. And some results are incredible.'

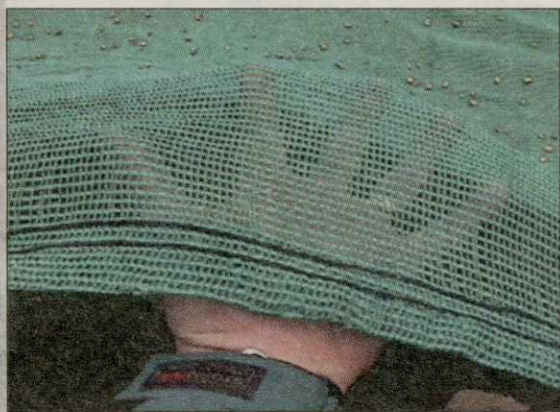
— Serge Gauthier

The temperature never dipped below 5 or 6 degrees Celsius (32 to 34 Fahrenheit), which *poa annua* can survive, he said.

A bonus of the Bubble Covers is that they are fairly translucent which helps kick-start the grass in the spring when the top cover is removed.

Since each cover is tailor-fit to a specific green, it is labeled for use the next year.

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Tough plastic netting, left, is the first layer placed on the green before winter strikes. It allows the turf to breathe and also serves to easily pick up whatever is on top of it. On top of the netting, crews lay down the translucent Bubble Cover, right, which insulates in the winter time and allows radiant heat when spring arrives. Both the netting and Bubble Cover are anchored down by a permeable cover.



BIGGA chairman calls on supers to 'uphold golf's heritage'

By MARK LESLIE

TORONTO — Golf course superintendents have a duty to the game and must uphold its heritage, something that maintaining "unnatural conditions" does not accomplish this, according to Gordon Child.

Child, a retired superintendent and chairman of British & International Golf Greenkeepers Association (BIGGA), said golf course caretakers should agree to certain basic principles of maintenance.

"One thing that does irritate me greatly is golfers telling us how we should achieve what they want," Child told his colleagues in a session at the 50th Canadian International Turfgrass Conference & Trade Show held here in March.

Saying that his "basic principles" are based on golf's traditions and not necessarily for every superintendent, who may face environmental conditions that require other maintenance measures, Child spelled them out.

"First, we don't realize how little fertilizer grass needs," he said. "I believe we only need to use limited phosphates. In the UK [United Kingdom], some of the best

golf courses you see are on very low phosphate readings and some of the worst are on high-phosphate readings...

"The Old Course at St. Andrews uses very little phosphate, yet the course stands up to a lot of play."

St. Andrews, he said, also "encourages the fine grasses to dominate, and they do."

Child added that applying nitrogen more is far less expensive than phosphate and is more consistent and reliable.

Another element Child cites is "free drainage."

"Irrigation is far too readily used," he said, even though grass will not live without it.

He suggested that superintendents keep their courses dry, "but never ever to the point of burning the turf itself."

Referring to the many schools of thought about top dressing, Child said, "We should think of top dressing in relation to the root zone."

Saying that a "pure sand green" builds up humus and therefore is not pure sand for long, he said that changes the way of dealing with the question of top dressing.

"I think we should add some sort of humus into the root zone," he said.

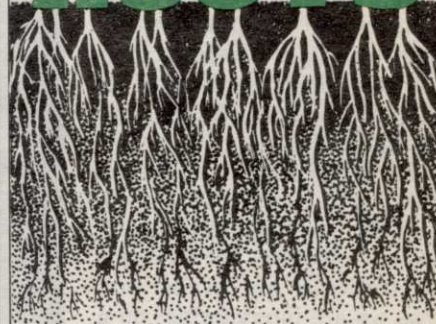


"This is really taking off in Quebec," said Fern Maille of Charm Services Inc. in Bellefeuille, Quebec, who sells Bubble Cover. Although Bubble Cover is being shipped across North America for swimming pools, it is sold only in the Province of Quebec for golf courses, he said. "I believe this year we will be selling it in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, and looking for distributors in the U.S."

"It's just a question of having enough testimony to convince the guys to at least use it on one or two greens."

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