

By Joe Jemsek

A designer's view

WHY CHOOSE TURF CONVERSION?

Turf conversion is a relatively inexpensive, long-term solution to water conservation.

The only way to permanently reduce water consumption is to reduce the amount of irrigated turfgrass. Replacing irrigated turf with non-irrigated or reduced irrigated materials such as pine straw, wood chips, drought tolerant field grasses, or native sand bunkers can reduce water usage by up to 30 percent. The benefits include not only water conservation, but reducing annual maintenance costs and providing a natural look to parkland-style golf courses.

What courses are good candidates?

Courses that are irrigated well to wall and located in arid or semi-arid climates can see the greatest return on investment from a turf conversion project. However, any golf course can see cost-saving benefits from a turf conversion by replacing maintained turf with naturalized areas. The ancillary benefits of reducing maintained turf grass, includes cost savings on turf maintenance, chemical applications, utilities and overseeding costs.

How much can a course really save?

A typical golf course uses around 6,500 gallons per acre per watering cycle. If a conversion plan eliminated 20 to 30 acres of turf, the water savings could be between 130,000 to 260,000 gallons daily. For example, in Southern California if a course saved 200,000 gallons per day over 200 nights, it would translate to 40 billion gallons and a cost savings of more than \$165,000 per year. In just a few months these cost savings can offset the expense of the turf conversion.

How does turf conversion begin?

Before embarking on any turf conversion, solicit the help of a golf course designer and irrigation consultant to analyze the course and the irrigation system. After taking inventory of the site, identify areas for turf removal and develop a plan. For example, tee surrounds are an excellent option and can provide contrasting textures to help define golf features.

Before implementing any changes to the course, display plans near the pro shop and educate staff and players about the planned water conservation efforts. Players will recognize

the course is taking environmentally friendly actions through the management of precious resources like water. Change is difficult, but when informed, players are more willing to accept the conditions during the process.

To get started, replace full-circle sprinkler heads around tees with reduced radius heads and only irrigate tee tops. Rough widths can be reduced by part-circling sprinkler heads in between landing areas and along tree lines. As new irrigation limits are realized, edge grass lines and follow the plan to convert areas.

What are the results?

By the next growing season, the advantages of the program will extend far beyond water conservation and will enhance the aesthetic appeal of the course with a contemporary and natural style. Often times, water conservation occurs only in response to water restrictions. Before water restrictions are imposed at your course, consider implementing a turf conversion project. GCI

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A before photo and after rendering of what a turf conversion may look like.



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