



# Filling the void

Superintendents share their best-kept secrets for divot repair.

By Scott Kauffman

For golf generations, divots have been the bane of golfers and superintendents, making divot repair and divot management programs an integral part of golf course maintenance practices. In a 1941 installment of the “Greenskeeper’s Reporter,” a story even quoted three greens chairmen as saying, “divots were the ‘No. 1 pest.’”

Oddly enough, despite this high-profile place in turf maintenance annals, little research had been done on the methods and materials used to control this “pest” – at

least until a recent study by the University of Illinois.

Among the findings published in 2005 by the GCSAA, respondents spent an average \$3,671 in labor and materials to repair divots on course tees, \$4,240 on fairways and \$3,383 on range tees. There was a wide range in annual divot-related expenditures, ranging from \$500 to \$33,000, according to the GCSAA.

Seven years later, vast differences continue to exist in the scope of superintendents’ turf practices in regards to divot repair. For



example, superintendent Jason Adams of Blue Hill Country Club in Canton, Mass., takes a measured approach to repairing his private course divots, including the use of a special mix supplied by New England Specialty Soils.

Adams says one critical tip in ensuring healthy divot repair is picking the “right mix that works



Divots cost courses thousands in repair through labor and materials - finding the right fill mix is critical to help fix them quickly.

for you.” In the case of Blue Hill, Adams uses an 80-10-10 mix of sand, peat and compost material, respectively. He also dedicates an individual every day to fill in divots not only on range tees, but the entire course as well.

Another key practice that Adams employs is making a point to give par-3 holes and range tees a “little extra moisture” a couple times a day just to “keep the mix a little bit on the moist side.”

Another ingredient Adams finds helpful is the EarthWorks Renovate Construction Mix.

Adams mixes in the amendment with his seed-soil mix and finds the extra source of minerals heals his turf quicker.

“For us we feel like we get quicker germination when we mix the Renovate in with the seed soil mix,” Adams says.

On the Southern California coast, superintendent Steve Thomas of the Resort at Pelican Hill implemented several changes to his divot repair regimen after Pelican Hill completely renovated its upscale courses in 2006-07 and converted the property from a ryegrass-Bermudagrass fairway mix to 100 percent Tifway 2 Bermudagrass fairways. For instance, Thomas now uses straight sand to fill in fairway divots that no longer need to be overseeded.

Thomas is experimenting with a darker custom divot blend to help speed up recovery because the darker compost material tends to “heat up the ground temperature and help the Bermuda recover a little quicker.”

In fact, when Thomas drew up the pros and cons of fully resodding Pelican Hill’s fairways with Bermudagrass the first one he came up with was divot repair, especially in the winter months when the Bermuda goes semi-dormant.

“So we fill (the divots) as fast as we can with sand,” says Thomas, who’s entering his 10th year at the Tom Fazio-designed resort course. “We still overseed the tees so we send a crew out typically as a second job and fill the tee-tops, particularly on the par-3s that get a lot of iron play. Our second jobs are usually around 9-10 o’clock. There’ll be some play, but we’ll go behind them and take care of the divots from the day before.”

Besides the new Tifway 2 fairways, two other noticeable changes to Thomas’ daily divot repair schedule are painted sand and re-filling divot boxes. Nei-

ther of these divot practices is deployed anymore.

Thomas stopped painting divot sand for cosmetic reasons as a cost- and labor-savings measure. He also got rid of his “tacky” divot boxes because golfers never utilized them, or didn’t know what to do with them, according to Thomas.

“We tried to use them in different locations but (golfers) seemed to ignore them, kick them and just put their drinks on ‘em,” says Thomas, who’s in his 10th year as Pelican Hill’s superintendent. “We just never really gotten use out of them. So our guys will do the balance of the divots in-house. We get pretty good control that way.”

At one of Florida’s newest private golf clubs, Bella Collina in Montverde, Fla., superintendent Jeff Helms doesn’t have anywhere near the budget or crew that Thomas enjoys. So Helms goes about his daily divot drudgery the old-fashioned way: divot-by-divot, and hoping members and guests fill in their part, too.

Helms relies on the golfers to replace and fill fairway divots due to his short staff situation. For the tees, especially during the winter overseed months, Helms goes out 1-2 times per week and simply fills in divots with Florida’s ubiquitous green divot sand – mixed with a 5-to-1 ratio of sand to ryegrass seed in large 5-gallon buckets.

“It’s not a big science project going on out there,” says Helms.

But it works for Bella Collina for now. And probably dozens of other cash-strapped superintendents driven to control those dastardly divots. **GCI**

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