

# Tips

## Preparing for Sodding

### Experts offer basic but often overlooked pointers

BY LARRY AYLWARD, EDITOR

**I**f you're planning to regrass those worn and torn sections on your fairways with sod, here are some pointers on how to prepare for the process from three experts — David Doguet, owner of Bladerunner Farms in Poteet, Texas; John Marman, Nevada operations manager for Palm Desert, Calif.-based West Coast Turf; and Dale Habenicht, president of H&E Sod in Momence, Ill.

Doguet, Marman and Habenicht admit some of their tips are basic. However, they agree their suggestions

are often overlooked by superintendents and crews.

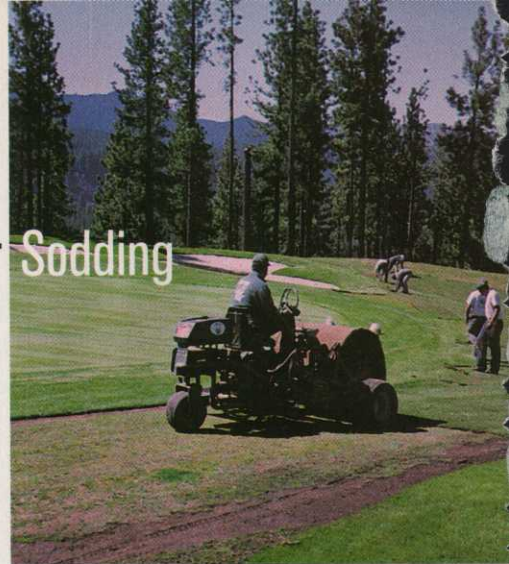
Irrigation plays a vital role in sodding — and from different standpoints. Before laying sod, Doguet says superintendents need to ensure irrigation systems are functioning properly.

“It sounds basic, but [a poor functioning irrigation system] can be a problem,” he says. “You need to make sure your heads and pumps are working.”

Sprinkler patterns also need to be checked and adjusted if they are out of sync, Doguet adds.

Superintendents should also irrigate the sections to be sodded beforehand to locate puddling areas and correct them with new or improved drainage.

Marman says soil should be irrigated about five minutes before laying sod so



it's moist but firm. “That helps create suction to pull down the sod,” he notes. “Then the soil underneath is not going to suck the water out of the sod.”

Soil preparation is also an obvious but vital element that is sometimes overlooked. “In general, when we go to sites, we notice the soil hasn't been prepared properly,” Doguet says.

Superintendents need to do a soil analysis, Doguet stresses. Then the soil

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pH needs to be corrected if it's too high or low.

Marman stresses how important it is for superintendents to attain the proper acidity or alkaline pH levels in soil.

"If you have an acidic soil, which a course would have in a high rainfall

area, you incorporate lime into the soil to bring the pH up to an acceptable level, which is about six," Marman says. Lime contains calcium or magnesium, which neutralizes acidity, he notes.

Marman says soil in arid and low rainfall areas is more apt to be alkaline. He adds that superintendents can use

sulfur to control pH. "When you're getting ready to resod a fairway or do any sod work where you've stripped out a large area, it's best to apply lime or sulfur and rototill it into the soil," Marman says.

The soil may also require a preplant fertilizer, Doguet notes.

Marman says superintendents should also use a steel drag mat to remove any imperfections in the soil. Rocks and stones should also be removed.

Weeds and invasive grass should be eradicated. If contaminated areas aren't sprayed before the sod is planted, weeds and invasive grass will grow rapidly because of heavy watering after the sod is laid, Doguet says. "If you do it beforehand, you don't have to worry about it after the grass is planted," he notes.

The bottom line: Don't rush preparations. "You want to take as much time as you can to prepare the soil and obtain the surface you want," Marman says.

Once the surface is prepared, don't wait too long to lay the sod or the prepared area could become recontaminated, Habenicht says.

Habenicht also notes that superintendents should lay sod soon after it's delivered because the sod could die.

"Sometimes they get a load of sod and think it's going to keep for several days," Habenicht says. "The sod needs to be installed within 24 hours after it's received. It doesn't have a long shelf life."

There are also important things to do immediately after sod is laid, the experts say. Doguet says new sod should be watered soon after it's planted. Too often, crews wait until an entire acre of sod is planted before watering.

"You can lose a lot of grass that way," Doguet says. "You need to have someone with a hose to stay behind the planting. Watering manually until you can turn on your irrigation system is important."

Sod should be rolled as soon as it's laid. "That way you increase your sod to soil contact and take out any little pockets of air," Marman says. ■



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