

Syringing with Style

**It requires use of the senses,
especially sight and feel,
as well as keen concentration**

BY LARRY AYLWARD, EDITOR



There's an art and science to syringing. It's not just spraying water on a green for a few minutes to cool off the turf's canopy, or to prevent wilt and localized dry spot. Syringing has more pizzazz

than that.

One could say that syringing is a lot like cooking. A good cook knows just the right amount of spices to add to a dish. A good syringer knows just the amount of water to spray on a green on a scorching July day.

Syringing is also not a mindless maintenance endeavor. It requires use of the senses, especially sight and feel, as well as keen concentration.

John Denholm, superintendent of Sparrow Point CC in Baltimore, says syringing is a regular part of his water-management plan. The course uses its irrigation system and workers hand-water greens as part of syringing.

Marc Snyder, director of golf course operations for Rio Grande CC in Rio Verde, Ariz., says a good syringing program combines both those methods. "I don't think you can rely on one or the other."

Syringing goes hand in hand with labor. If a course has maintenance workers to spare, the superintendent may be able to disperse a few of them to syringe by hand.



FILE PHOTO

Marc Snyder, director of golf course operations for Rio Grande CC, says you can never take the human touch out of syringing.

During the week, Denholm mostly uses a small crew to syringe. But on the weekends, when there aren't as many workers at the course, Denholm turns on the course's irrigation system to syringe for about two

Issue

How does a superintendent build a solid syringing program? Does he use his irrigation system to syringe, instruct workers to hand-water or both?

Solution

Syringing is not a mindless endeavor, especially when it comes to hand-watering. A good syringing program is composed of workers who are experienced and have a "feel" for the process.

minutes. "When there are not enough workers, and we have to get the greens cooled off, we have to do it the quickest way we can," Denholm says.

In Arizona, syringing by hand is a must because of weather elements, such as the wind, that adversely affect syringing by automated irrigation, Snyder says. However, the course also does its share of syringing by automated irrigation because it's less labor-intensive. When syringing by the latter, Snyder points out the importance of making sure that sprinkler nozzles are working properly to ensure adequate coverage.

Some superintendents prefer hand-watering solely, including Nels Lindgren, certified superintendent of Loch Lloyd CC in Belton, Mo. He says he would never rely on automated irrigation to syringe greens. "The only reason we would do something like that is if we were way over the edge as far as dry goes, and we were in a panic mode to try and save grass," he says.

Denholm also prefers syringing by hand, even though he has nothing against cooling off greens and their surrounds by overhead irrigation on a sweltering day. "We try to do a lot more syringing by hand because the [irrigation system's] heads don't always get water where the course needs it," he adds.

Experience counts

It's important that workers assigned to syringing are experienced at the task.

"Some guys on my crew have been here eight to 10 years and have been in the business for 15 years," Denholm says. "They're the people I'd rather have syringing because they understand it. Some of the newer guys and college kids are smart and hard workers, but it's harder to teach them what to look for when syringing."

Bob Miller, superintendent of Enjoie GC in Endicott, N.Y., says he assigns two or three seasoned workers to hand syringe at the course because they "have a feel" for the process. The

workers know the course well enough to know what areas to scout for dryness. They also test the areas with a soil probe.

Miller says the best syringers have a deep understanding of the process. Snyder couldn't agree more and points

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SPARROW POINT CC

out that while computerized irrigation systems have helped superintendents become more specialized in certain maintenance areas, including syringing, they can't replace the human touch completely.

"You have to go out on the course, and use your eyes and your hands to get the job done," Snyder says. "I don't care how many computers you have in your office. If you don't go out and inspect with your hands and eyes, you'll run a greater risk of failure."

Lindgren says there are tools of the trade to help superintendents monitor the temperature of greens, but he prefers simply to put his hand down on a green to see how hot it is.

Denholm instructs employees to scout for wilt when on syringing duty. If you lay your hand on a green and it leaves a print, the turf is wilting, Denholm says he tells them.

Denholm also requires his syringing crew to take a soil probe with them.

"If there are areas that are wilting badly, I'll have them check the areas with a soil probe," Denholm says. "If the soil moisture is really low, I'll have them hit those areas a little more."

Snyder says superintendents should mark hot spots on the course to aid them in syringing. They can do that through mapping or cataloging.

"Then they'll know from one year to the next where the course's soil problems are, where its drainage problems are and how they'll be able to track them from year to year," Snyder adds. "They're never the same from year to year, but they give you a good idea of where you need to go to attack certain areas by hand with supplemental irrigation."

Lindgren likes to run the greens firm and fast at Loch Lloyd. He instructs two or three workers to watch for hard and dry spots on the greens. Lindgren says the workers carry small knives or screwdrivers with them to probe areas on the greens for dryness.

Just because a turf spot is brown or slightly off color doesn't mean it

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needs water, Lindgren says. "If it's soft, it doesn't need water," Lindgren notes. "If it's hard, it needs water."

Time is the essence

Superintendents have different philosophies regarding syringe time.

"That's a hard thing to try and teach somebody," Denholm says. "I judge time by looking at the turf. If the grass responds quickly to the syringe, you're done."

Michael Masterson, superintendent of Gowanda CC in Springville, N.Y., says how long to syringe directly corresponds with how much water to apply.

"Too much is no good, and not enough is no good," he says. "There's a happy medium for it to be just right. But you don't want there to be a lake when you're done."

Don't drown the turf, Miller warns. "You want to water just enough to moisten the soil and keep the grass blades alive. It only takes a few minutes."

Soil infiltration has much to do with syringe time. The greens at Rio Verde are push-up greens with poor drainage.

"Our infiltration rates are anywhere from 1.27 inches to 1.24 inches an hour," Snyder says. "If I turned on the sprinkler heads for five minutes, most of the water I applied would run off the surface and go somewhere I don't want it to go. We can't water too much at one time. We have to do a lot of short cycles to get water moving down [the soil profile]."

Snyder's advice is to study the soil profile. "You have to know how much water moves through the soil profile and try to balance that between the application rate vs. the infiltration rate."

To help with the process

Some superintendents use wetting agents to aid in syringing. Lindgren buys about four 55-gallon barrels of wetting agents a year and injects them into the course's irrigation system, which covers the course's 40 acres of bentgrass tees, greens and fairways. "The entire course gets wetting agents, but we use specialized wetting agents on the greens that last longer," he says.

Denholm sprays a wetting agent on the course's greens about every three weeks. "They help the areas of the greens that don't get hit with sprinklers as much," he says, noting that wetting agents also reduce water from running off.

Snyder advises superintendents to find a good wetting agent and stick with it. ■

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