

Preserving Ponds

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for keeping water free
of algae and weeds

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By Larry Aylward, Editor in Chief

Algae are essential for golf course ponds. They provide food for fish and other creatures. But you know what they say about having too much of a good thing. That goes for algae.

Too much algae, says James B. Beard in his book, "Turf Management for Golf Courses," can cause problems such as bad odors, toxins and ugly-as-Frankenstein-to-look-at scum.

But a question lingers: How much algae is too much algae in a golf course pond? Paul Galligan, superintendent of Grand Traverse Resort in Traverse City, Mich., offers the definitive answer:

"When the golfer tells the golf pro and the golf pro tells the general manager and the general manager tells the superintendent that, 'Hey, the algae is bad in the pond.'"

Galligan chuckles at his reply. He admits his amusing response is somewhat true. But Galligan, who oversees three

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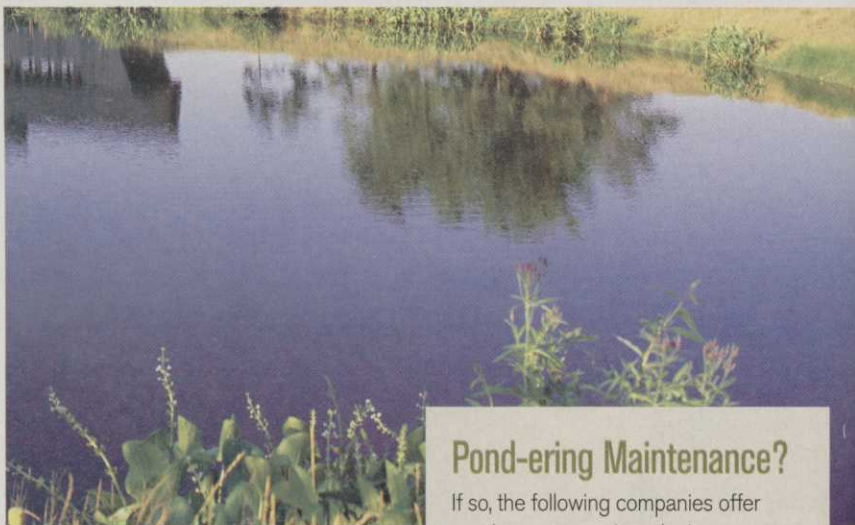
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Preserving Ponds



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golf courses that contain about 40 ponds, is kind of forced to deal with pond maintenance, what with all that water. But he admits that having perfect-looking ponds doesn't rank in the same category as having consistently smooth-running greens.

"I get a few complaints that the ponds look the way they do," says Galligan, noting the ponds range in size from a half acre to about 5 acres. "But with 50,000 rounds of golf going through here, that's about the last thing I'm worried about."

That said, the golf course's ponds aren't forsaken territory. Galligan and his crew will maintain them when the algae appear on the verge of taking over the ponds.

"You know when the algae becomes a nuisance," Galligan says. "You see balls sitting on top of it."

Galligan believes the best way to remove the algae is manually — two workers in waders with floating rakes in their grips.

"When the algae gets bad, you have to take it out with a rake because nothing else is going to take care of it," Galligan says.

It takes two workers about 16 hours to clean the algae out of a 1- to 2-acre pond, Galligan estimates.

"You're pulling rake load after rake load, and you have to pitch fork it into the [utility vehicle]," he says. "Then you have to haul it away and come back and do another load."

Galligan treat his ponds with chemicals on occasion. He uses an algicide with copper sulfate a few times a year, mostly on the pond in front of the clubhouse.

Sometimes Mother Nature will take care of the algae. "We just got an inch and a half of rain," Galligan says. "Any algae we had just kind of disappeared. But it may come back in a few more days."

Galligan is content to let nature dic-

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tate a pond's appearance as much as possible. Many of the ponds on the three courses have large buffer zones around them, which feature long grass, shrubs and other plants. With such a natural appearance around the ponds, the algae in the water tend to blend in the surroundings. "But if you're mowing the

banks down to the water, I'd be more inclined to try to have a clean water surface," Galligan notes.

If you're raking the algae, Galligan warns you to watch out for weeds. If struck with a rake, a weed will break up, spread and eventually sprout. Weeds can be a problem, but Galligan says most never rise above the surface of the water.

"So you don't see them unless you're looking right at them," he adds.

If there comes a time that the weeds need to be eliminated, a water herbicide can be used or the pond can be drained and the weeds excavated.

Jim Black, the assistant superintendent of Renditions Golf Course in Davidsonville, Md., has tried many strategies to rid golf course ponds of algae and weeds, but he always comes back to nature. After many unsuccessful bouts of trying to rid a 1.5-acre pond of duckweed, Black decided to let nature have its way.

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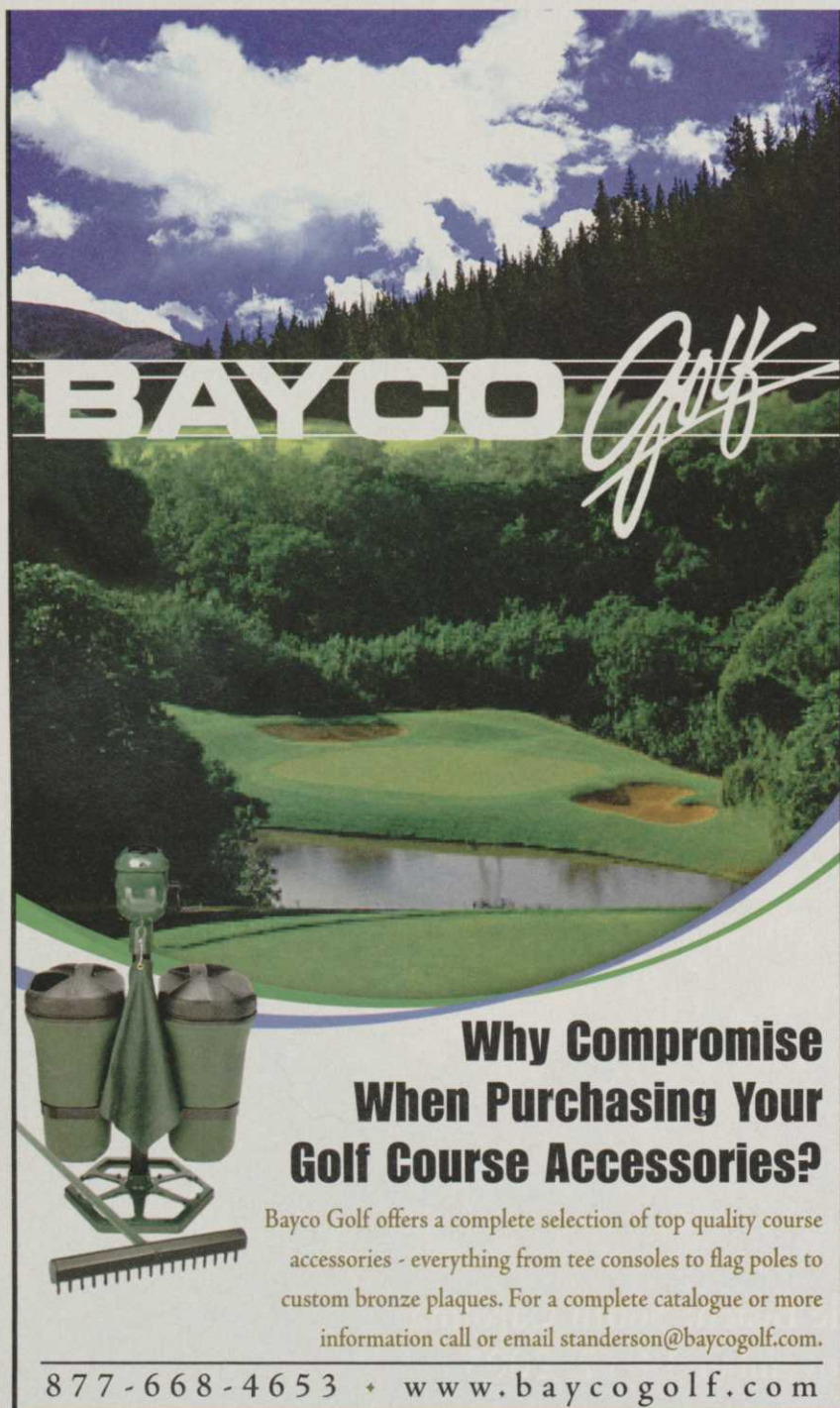
"After many failed attempts and lots of input from players as to how to get rid of it, I finally decided it was pretty and left it alone," Black says. "What a relief!"

And what of the algae? "My best remedy of all was to stock the pond with carp," Black says. "They love the algae and can be quite fascinating to watch."

Beard writes in his book that algae control goes hand in hand with addressing nutrient input, especially phosphorus. He also cites that water aeration helps control algae, especially in shallow ponds.

There are other ways to handle pond maintenance — and not have to worry about it. For Jim Nicol, certified superintendent of Hazeltine National Golf Club, it's easiest to outsource the job to a local company.

"It's pretty cost-effective and they do a good job," he says. ■



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