

The buzzword (and it doesn't have much zip) in golf course conditioning these days is "brown." People in the industry, from golfers to architects to superintendents, say, "We need more *brown* and less green on golf courses."

Of course, the request for "more brown" in golf is the result of the "green" movement that has infiltrated, not just the golf industry, but many parts of the world. It's smart and fashionable to "go green." Hence, "brown" has become "green" in the golf course industry. (Did I just write that?)

I don't know about you, but I think brown is a hideous color. Examine any 6-year-old kid's box of well-used Crayola crayons, and you'll find the brown crayon still has its pointy tip — if the kid didn't already break the crayon in half. Even at an early age, we're repulsed by brown.

How many brown-colored cars do you see on the road? How many brown shirts do you own? (Your mother-in-law doesn't think much of you if she gave you a brown shirt for Christmas.) Brown is a hue the golf industry shouldn't touch with a 10-foot bunker rake. Yet, we keep hearing industry people — big-named people like Greg Norman — insist American golf courses need to be tinged with more brown.

When he gave his keynote address at the Golf Industry Show in 2008, Norman, chairman of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America's Environmental Institute for Golf's Advisory Council, told thousands in the audience that "there's nothing wrong with the brown look."

But there's a lot wrong with the "brown look." And the wrong begins with the word "brown." Brown conveys an image as dark, dreary and depressing as the word itself.

When people say, "We need more brown grass on golf courses," that communicates to me they want golf courses to look like my neighbor's lawn — the half-acre eyesore wiped out by pythium and billbugs last summer. It's brown, all right. And it looks pitiful.

'Brown' Is Not The New 'Green'

BY LARRY AYLWARD



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I don't think we want golf courses to look like my neighbor's lawn. I mean, who are we kidding? American golfers, who adore premium conditions, will never play disease-laden and bug-eaten courses. Nor should they.

To chemical companies that manufacture and market pesticides, "more brown" also insinuates a notion to stop using their products. Of course, reducing pesticide use is a huge component of the "green" movement.

This is troubling because chemical companies are investing a lot of time and money to make pesticides less toxic and more environmentally friendly with incredibly low use rates. And they are succeeding.

I realize that "more brown" is also associated with less water use. I'm all for that, as I'm sure are most superintendents, who would rather reduce irrigation and sport firm and fast golf courses. But, again, "brown" is not the right descriptive word. It's one thing to let turfgrass go dormant with the idea of it coming back. It's another thing to let it go "brown," with the idea it could contract disease and die.

I think what Norman and others are urging is that American golf courses are too hung up on having every dang blade of grass in place to appease golfers. I agree that golf courses can be less perfect-looking.

But "the brown look" is not "the look" courses want. Courses can still be green and natural-looking without looking like something from an Edgar Allen Poe poem.

The moral of this column: The turfgrass on your golf courses doesn't have to be perfect, but it surely doesn't have to be brown.

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