


Act Now

10 EASY THINGS YOU CAN DO TO
CONSERVE WATER ON YOUR GOLF COURSE
— *IMMEDIATELY*

BY CHRISTOPHER S. GRAY SR.,
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR



Gray is always thinking about conserving water.

WATER CONSERVATION seems to be getting a lot of attention. I, for one, say it's about bloody time! Perhaps the stark realization of the enormous obstacles our industry is facing when it comes to both the quantity and the quality of available water for golf courses is finally hitting home. With less water out there for consumption, reducing the amounts we need to sustain our golf courses is quickly becoming a top priority around the country.

The benefits of conserving water go well beyond just saving actual amounts of water. There are multiple trickle-down effects that go along with water-conservation programs, ranging from sharply reduced labor costs to significantly decreased energy use. And whether you're a superintendent at a high-end private course or a low-end public course, everyone uses water and will need to find ways to lower the amounts used on golf courses.

With that in mind, here are some simple and inexpensive things you can do now to help conserve water on your golf course.

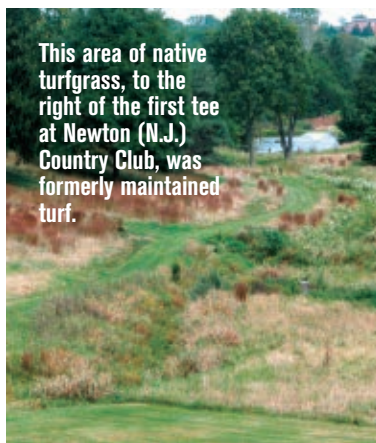


No. 1 Check Your Nozzles

Irrigation nozzles wear down over time, and most of us have likely not inspected them regularly . . . or ever. These nozzles are also the key to the distance the head ultimately throws the water, which probably hasn't been measured since its initial installation. In many situations, replacing worn nozzles and making sure the proper nozzles are being used will save massive amounts of water.

No. 2 Reduce Your Turf Areas

Simple logic here — reduce your maintained turf and you also reduce the amount of water needed to maintain that area. Not exactly rocket science, but I think you get the point. Convert an out-of-normal play area to a naturalized area and there's no need to irrigate it beyond establishment. What constitutes an out-of-normal-play area may vary depending on which golfer you ask.



No. 4 Change Irrigation Risers

Quite often, full-circle risers are throwing water in areas that really don't need any. Heads that run near the golf course perimeters are particularly guilty of this. By investigating these areas, you can see if you're accidentally irrigating the parking lot or nearby pond. A quick change-out with a part-circle riser will correct this water waster.

No. 3 Maintain Your Irrigation System

We all get irrigation weepers at times. We all, however, don't always fix them right away. We should. Proper maintenance is absolutely critical to water conservation. The potential to waste large amounts of water is greatest from irrigation systems that aren't repaired and maintained. Put simply: If it's broke, fix it.

Continued on page 54

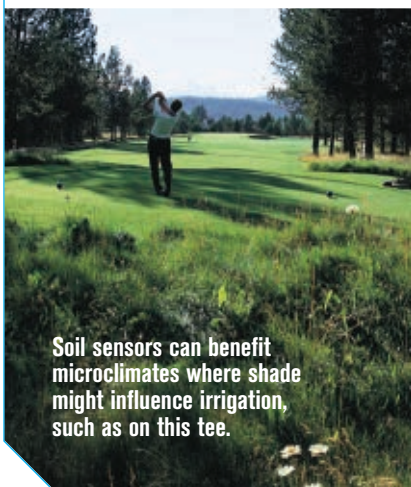
Continued from page 53

No. 5 Use Wetting Agents

No brainer. Using wetting agents will better distribute the water in the soil profile, keeping it from going dry. The biggest benefit of utilizing them on the greens is helping eliminate the costly need for hand-watering. That alone makes them ultra-valuable in your water-conservation program.

No. 7 Install Moisture Sensors

Moisture sensors are awesome technology that are just scratching the surface of their potential for golf course management. By receiving readouts from the sensors in the soil profile, you can make irrigation adjustments based on what's actually going on down there. While still in its infancy, soil-sensor technology is the wave of the future for golf course water management. But until competitive pricing make it more readily available for the 85 percent of golf courses still suffering from our economic downturn, see No. 8..



Soil sensors can benefit microclimates where shade might influence irrigation, such as on this tee.



No. 6 Increase Your Height of Cut

Think back to Turf 101 class, and you'll recall that taller grasses use less water than shorter grasses. It's all about leaf tissue. Sometimes making a small adjustment in your height of cut can yield huge water savings in your irrigation programs. I'm not even talking about your green height, which would likely never happen anyway. Fairways and rough are the largest areas where you can easily save water by slightly increasing the height.

No. 8 Harvest Rain and Runoff Water

With water supplies drying up quicker than capital expenditure budgets, we need to capitalize on the water Mother Nature sometimes sends us. While this may sound overly ambitious to many of us, often times it's simply a matter of rerouting or installing a few pipes to redirect the water to make it go where we want it to go. The key to success in harvesting lies in making gravity work for us, not against us.

No. 9 Use Soil Probes

Admittedly much less technologically advanced than No. 7, these easy-to-use, yet helpful tools have been around for years, supplying superintendents with the art behind the science aspect of moisture analysis. Every superintendent's maintenance cart should include one of these.

No. 10 Educate Your Golfers

Communication is always good, and with water conservation, it's one of the best tools you have at your disposal. Keeping your golfers informed about your course's water situation can proactively help you with any potential problems that might arise. By including them in your conservation activities, you will likely be gaining an ally in your continued fight. ■