

Fipronil vs. the mole crickets

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dict says. "They can do some damage."

That's not to say that mole crickets can't be controlled or defeated — and superintendents take pleasure in doing so. There are tried-and-true methods and insecticides to control mole crickets, as well as newer products and processes.

Benedict says products containing the active ingredient fipronil can be used to rid courses of mole crickets. "I've used it with wonderful results," he adds.

What's impressive about fipronil, Benedict notes, is its residual, which lasts between six months to a year. "I had a

Managing Mole Crickets

You don't have to call in the National Guard, but this five-step process will help you control these hideous critters.

1. Mapping. Find out where the mole crickets are living in the spring. It's a good bet they're laying eggs in the same areas, so you have a good idea of the infested areas.

2. Monitoring. The tool used for monitoring is the soapy water flush, which irritates the heck out of mole crickets. It consists of a sprinkling can filled with 2 gallons of water and 2 tablespoons of lemon-scented liquid dishwashing detergent. After

the mixture is applied to the infested areas, the newly hatched nymphs will scurry to the soil surface where they can be observed.

3. Selection. Now it's time to pick the appropriate product to do away with the mole crickets. Consider your local or golf course's environmental policy when doing so. Also consider the characteristics of each product and the type of soil you're using it on.

4. Timing. As they say, it's everything. It's also the most vital factor in mole cricket management. It's crucial to time most treatments for ap-

plication about three weeks after the first major hatch. If you apply the treatment too late, you're in danger of trying to control large crickets while they're already damaging your course.

5. Follow-up procedures. If mole cricket infestations are severe, few products will provide the desired level of control with one application. It's a good idea to return to treated areas about two weeks after initial application and begin soapy water flushes to determine the level of control. Map the areas requiring retreatment.

SOURCE: TURFGRASS TRENDS; RICK BRANDENBURG, NORTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY



year of control on my property," Benedict adds.

Fipronil belongs to the phenylpyrazole class of insecticides and was introduced to the industry in 1996. The insecticide has ingestion and contact activity, and acts on a mole cricket's nervous system. Fipronil could be registered for use on fire ants by year's end.

The only drawback with fipronil is its price, Benedict says, although he expects it to drop in coming years. "To treat your course wall to wall with fipronil is not cost-effective," he adds.

Keep in mind, though, that a long-lasting application of fipronil can also be economical.

Tom Burton, former superintendent at Sea Island in St. Simons Island, Ga., clashed with mole crickets for 20 years and also cites fipronil as an excellent solution. He acknowledges the chemical's expense, but advises superintendents to devise a battle plan to keep costs down.

Whatever treatment you're using, especially if it's an expensive product that would be costly to use on an entire course, it makes economic sense to spot treat to save money, Burton points out. When he was superintendent at Sea Island GC, Burton and his crew would draw a map of each hole on the course. Then they would survey each hole to discover where mole cricket infestations were occurring. Then they would spot treat the areas and constantly monitor them for pest activity.

Mole crickets will mostly hunker down in the same areas on a golf course. If you found them left of the 13th green last summer, you can bet they'll be back there this spring.

Benedict says chlorpyrifos and acephate, two tried-and-true products used to control mole crickets, remain excellent products to control mole crickets. "You can get a good six to eight weeks of residual with them," he adds.

Burton mentions that bifenthrin can also provide the knock-out punch on mole crickets.

No matter what product you're using, Benedict's advice is to stay on top of mole cricket activity. Don't let them control you.

"You have to know your expectations," he says. "One mole cricket won't be a problem. But if you have 100 of them in a certain area, you have to be able to determine what your threshold level is and how much damage you can take.

"It's a never-ending battle." ■

**Whatever
treatment you're
using, it makes
economic sense
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save money.**



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IRRIGATION

You and your buddies are driving to this cool golf course to play 18 when a rabbit dashes in front of your car. You hit the brakes to avoid bashing Bugs Bunny — and you do — but your car skids into a ditch beside the road.

The car, while not damaged, is stuck in three feet of mud. Your tee time, minutes away, is in jeopardy.

So you call the course and tell the starter what happened, and that you still want to make your tee time to play the course (you'll worry about the car later). So the starter sends a van to pick you up and drive you and your friends to the course just in time to tee it up.

You're impressed, to say the least.

After the front nine, you head into the clubhouse. The food-and-beverage boss, after hearing that you've had an eventful morning, buys lunch for you and your friends. You're even more impressed.

But you ain't seen nothing yet.

When you finish the back nine, you're led to the parking lot where your washed and waxed car glistens in the afternoon sun. You stop in your tracks and look around, wondering if you're on *Candid Camera* — or *The X Files*, for that matter. You wonder what you did to deserve this.

Then it hits you: You've been on the receiving end of extraordinary and exemplary customer service. You smile as wide as the course's 8th fairway, all the while feeling good about the world.

Yes, this is a lesson in customer service — but it's also a true story (except for my embellishment of how the car landed in the ditch). It happened a few years ago at the Majestic at Lake Walden GC in Hartland, Mich., where customer service is as important to course operations as green grass — or more.

"We try to do things for our guests that are unexpected and out of the ordinary," says John Dodge, a partner with Lansing, Mich.-based R.O.I. Golf, the company that operates Majestic at Lake Walden and two other Lansing-area courses.

That's like saying Tiger Woods is an OK golfer. When you go to extremes like R.O.I. Golf sometimes does, it's legitimate to use

Customer Service to the Extreme

BY LARRY AYLWARD



IF YOU'VE LOST
YOUR BALL, DON'T
BE SURPRISED IF A
SUPERINTENDENT
STOPS TO HELP YOU
LOOK FOR IT

words like "extraordinary" and "exemplary."

While R.O.I. Golf operates three courses, including Hawk Hollow GC in Bath, Mich., and Eldorado GC in Mason, Mich., Dodge says the company is not in the golf business.

"We're in the entertainment business," he insists. "We're competing with every entertainment dollar out there."

That's precisely why R.O.I. Golf employees — from the superintendent to the beverage-cart operator — are schooled in the essentials of customer service. Through their actions, they want their customers to remember the overall experience so they come back.

It's not uncommon for an R.O.I. Golf superintendent to hang out at a hole for three hours conversing with golfers about course conditions. And if you hit your ball in the rough and can't find it, don't be surprised if the superintendent stops to help you look for it if he happens by on his utility vehicle.

To Dodge, customer service also means customer fun. To make golf enjoyable, Dodge and his staff stage pizza parties and other events on the course. One time, the Majestic at Lake Walden GC held a "Banana Weekend." Staffers dressed in yellow shirts and handed out bananas and other giveaways. The wacky event ended up being featured in the *Wall Street Journal*.

Dodge explains that Michigan — one of golf's present darling states — is opening about 30 courses a year. "How are we going to separate our courses from those courses?" he asks.

He knows the answer, of course. It lies in bending over backwards for your customers and pleasing them — even if it means tugging a golfer's Honda from a mud-filled ditch and shining it up like it was brand new.

Larry Aylward, managing editor of *Golfdom*, can be reached at 440-891-2770 or laylward@advanstar.com.



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Certain By Seed

Sodding is faster, but designer Bobby Weed used seed on the new Stoneridge GC because he felt it would create a more lasting course



Situation

To sod or seed the new Stoneridge GC near St. Paul, Minn.? Using sod would speed the course's opening and generate more revenue. But using seed made more sense.

Answer

Architect Bobby Weed decided on seed to capitalize on the site's natural advantages. Because the on-site material was so good, using sod would have introduced a layer of foreign soil that would not benefit the course in the long run.

The economics of building a new golf course force many projects to sod, speeding the course's opening so it will generate money more quickly.

In general, Bobby Weed, a golf course architect from Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla., understands that philosophy, but he recently encountered a project near St. Paul, Minn., that persuaded him to go in the other direction. Don't get him wrong: Weed wanted to open the course, Stoneridge GC, as soon as possible. But he decided on seed rather than sod in spite of its longer grow-in period.

"We didn't use a single slab of sod during grassing," Weed says. "Every square foot of the site was seeded."

The situation

This approach capitalized on the site's natural advantages. The course's back nine wound through an abandoned sand quarry from which capping material was

mined for in-play areas.

"We stripped topsoil off the golf holes down to the gravelly subsoil, and then came back with several feet of clean sand and shaped in that," Weed explains. "The sand we mined was so clean that it could be screened for gravel and pass the USGA particle-size analysis for greens mix."

Because the on-site material was so good, Weed says using sod would have introduced a layer of foreign soil that would not benefit the course over the long run.

"Agronomically, seeding is ideal," Weed says. "As one superintendent once told me, using sod is like having someone else raise your children. You can never be sure what you are introducing."

The process

Weed used a number of soil stabilization methods extensively throughout construction. Even the gentlest slopes were covered with erosion control blankets.

The course chose

Agronomically, seeding is ideal, says architect Bobby Weed. It gives you more control over the grassing plan.

biodegradable straw mats for the primary rough areas, non-biodegradable straw mats in out-of-play areas and Futera mats around tees and on fairways, says Stoneridge superintendent Hugh Lynch, who will oversee the course when it opens in July. Hydroseeding created bunker faces and the steepest slopes.

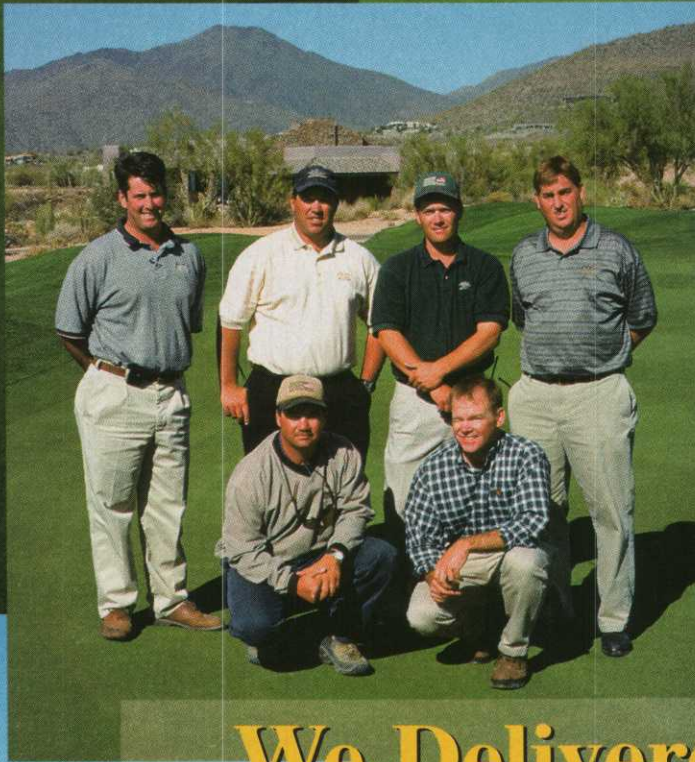
"We incorporated a soil-binding polymer into the slurry to help hold the slopes," Lynch explains. "The high percolation rate of the sand let the polymer penetrate downward to hold things together."

In addition to the matting, silt fence and sand bags were used to help protect newly seeded areas along the base of slopes.

The seed-only approach gave Weed and Lynch greater flexibility and control over the grassing plan. For example, Weed wanted as much

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fescue on the bunker faces as possible. Using the hydroseed and polymer, Weed seeded the bunkers with an 80/20 fescue/bluegrass mix, a much higher ratio than could be found at local sod farms.

Lynch also tweaked the seed mix to help provide quick cover. Regreen, a sterile oat that germinates in four to five days, was used in the native grass areas.

"The longer prairie grasses will not be fully mature for two years," Lynch says. "Regreen provides a similar look, but dies away after two years, letting the other grasses take over."

Interestingly, ryegrass, a

champion for quick germination, was not used. Weed says the aggressive nature of ryegrass would create long-term playability concerns in the roughs.

Obviously, using only seed presented some practical difficulties. Bunker faces located outside the coverage of the irrigation system have not filled in as quickly as those receiving water. Greens, tees and fairways were seeded with L-93 bentgrass, which germinated faster and required maintenance well ahead of the fescue/bluegrass roughs.

"Most courses under construction separate bentgrass areas from the roughs with a

sod belt," Lynch says. "Not having that belt has been a challenge, as my mowers are turning around on new seedlings."

Observations

However, the no-sod approach helped Weed achieve interesting design objectives that may not have been possible otherwise.

"The course is similar to the heathland layouts overseas," Weed notes. "We tried to duplicate their firm conditions and rugged look. Using only seed prevented us from building in the hard edge between grass lines that sod creates. We encouraged overlapping of seed, especially

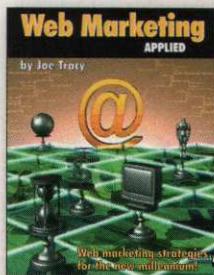
between the fairway and primary rough, to help achieve a lacy, undefined edge."

Hydroseeding the bunker faces will also allow Weed to hand edge the final outline of the sand.

"Unlike most courses, the native material was the bunker sand," he explains "By seeding right into it, we can wait until after germination to cut out the final edge of the bunker."

The use of the erosion control blanket also helped keep construction on schedule because large areas could be prepped, seeded and matted at once. The cost of the seed and blanket was less than sod, he adds. ■

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The stories in *Golfdom* last month about the mechanics shortage in the industry led me to wonder: Are there any scarier words than “I quit” for a superintendent to hear from a mechanic?

Let's face it, when your best mechanic packs his spanner wrench away for the last time and drives into the sunset, you are screwed.

Good mechanics are becoming members of the endangered species list. How many of the ones you know have a hands-on understanding of small engines, sophisticated mowers, tune-up procedures for your trucks, inventory management, reasonable computer literacy; as well as the ability to cut through the slick sales pitches of equipment vendors and, in their spare time, perform superhuman repairs to keep all your important rolling stock in service? A good mechanic is the ultimate “go-to-guy” and rarely gets credit for all he contributes in terms of saving the day.

Is it possible it's time to rethink how you treat your mechanics?

Mechanics are trained to think sequentially. Seeking input from a person with this common-sense view of the world may provide you with a new angle on solving that non-mechanical problem that has stumped you for weeks.

Mechanics can become very paternal about the equipment they repair. Seeing employees abuse equipment without penalties can become a large source of frustration for them. It might also send the unintended signal that, if you as a boss don't care about the equipment, why should they?

Speaking of abusing equipment, when is the last time you had a cup of coffee with your mechanic and inquired about who was not taking proper care of the equipment assigned to them? Employees who abuse equipment generally show disdain for other aspects of their employment with you.

Mechanics don't think in terms of the promises and warranties equipment manufacturers make regarding their products. Their lives revolve around how the piece of equipment performs when put to the test in the real world: How easy is it to operate and repair? The lesson here is that you should thoroughly discuss

Keep Mechanics Running Smoothly

BY DAVE ST. JOHN



HAVE YOU EVER
THANKED YOUR
MECHANIC FOR HIS
ROLE IN
PRODUCING YOUR
BEAUTIFUL
CONDITIONS?

equipment purchases with your mechanic.

Many of the mechanics I've known were tinkerers. They could take a piece of equipment that had been designed by an army of corporate engineers and with a few modifications make it easier to operate, easier to maintain and more reliable. Have you unlocked these creative juices in your mechanic?

For all their apparent “hard case” personalities, mechanics are a sensitive lot. This doesn't mean that you will find them sitting near the blue tees on the 15th humming mantras at the sunset every evening. But it does mean that they take a special sense of pride in the fact that their work has contributed mightily to the finely sculptured greens and fairways of your course. Have you taken your mechanic for a ride in your golf cart around the course lately and thanked him for his role in producing this beauty?

This “sensitivity” is often offset by a strong sense of independence. You will hear them use the possessive adjective “my” very frequently. It's “my shop” and “my equipment” and “my truck.” Don't be alarmed. A mechanic who thinks this way is the best friend you'll ever have when it comes to taking care of equipment. When a foreman or crew member comes to you in fear of their life because they have to tell the mechanic they damaged “his” equipment, remember this: Fear is good.

The modern mechanic is an anomaly. For most of us, the only time we think of him is when something breaks and needs to be repaired. We take him for granted during those times when our equipment runs perfectly.

Maybe that's why he just quit.

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