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# Designs on Golf

■ ARCHITECTURE

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What's the deal?

To resolve the issue, I got on the phone. My first call was to Skip Loater, vagabond shaper to architects and designer of two courses, both award-winning and costing under \$2 million to build. He's presently looking for work.

"Hell if I know why they look better," Skip said from Oklahoma where he currently has the 'bago parked while he reads the complete works of John Steinbeck. "Square tees just look simpler," he says. "They make a course look old. Those stupid whirly-wheely free form tees look like something out of Tee Building 101 that an overeducated landscape architect would think looks great. Maybe it does on his drafting table, but it sure doesn't on the ground."

I found Skip's answer enlightening. But I wasn't satisfied so I phoned Dr. Heimlich Penalbunker at Orlando's Center for the Preservation of Par. Dr. Penalbunker was not very helpful.

"Vee feel that square tees bring necessary precision to golf. If vee could streamline our fairway bunkering schemes in a linear manner similar to tee-box designs, vee would be on the cusp of more consistently protecting zee integrity of par."

I thanked the doctor and made a note to call him around U.S. Open time to see if he'd made any progress in his noble effort to locate par's integrity.

Next call was to architect Lawrence Lloyd Stevens, aka Larry Stevens. Larry changed his name at the height of the Robert Trent Jones triple-name fad. Larry's currently spending \$16 million of taxpayer money to "refresh" two Ohio public courses.

## Hip to be Square, With Tees That Is

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



THE MORE WE  
TRY TO MAKE  
SOMETHING LOOK  
NATURAL, THE  
MORE TROUBLE  
WE GET INTO

"We will build what the client wants. Square tees, triangle tees, whirly-hurly lined things soaring 20 feet into the air, whatever," Larry said from Hilton Head. "Heck, if the client wants us to jump around like Jack La Lanne while we build the tee, consider it done. As long as the check comes on time. You should call Dr. Sigfried Roy about this. That's pronounced "Wah," like the goalie. He'll know why square tees look better."

From his SoHo office in New York City, Dr. Roy asked, "Are you having dreams about square tees? This may be a sign that golf is conflicting with your inner anxieties. You should come soon so we can interpret these visions. Linear hallucinations require treatment immediately."

I thanked Dr. Roy but decided to go back to Skip Loater since he was the only one that proved helpful.

"Since you called, I've been thinking," Skip said. "The more we try to make something look natural, the more trouble we get into. Flat pads for teeing off a little ball are never going to be something you find in nature, so why try to emulate nature for tees?"

"Good point," I said. "But still, wouldn't just a little irregularity in the shape help?"

"Maybe if you are fitting it around a tree or at the base of a hill. But anytime you try too hard to create irregularity, people notice and that's no good," Skip said. "Here's the real problem. We prop tees up in the air so the golfers can supposedly see the hole better. But that only makes the tees stand out more no matter what the shape. That may be your answer there. Keep 'em simple, low to the ground, and you'll be fine."

Glad we got that squared away.

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*Geoff Shackelford's new book is Grounds for Golf: The History and Fundamentals of Design. He can be reached at [geoffshac@aol.com](mailto:geoffshac@aol.com).*

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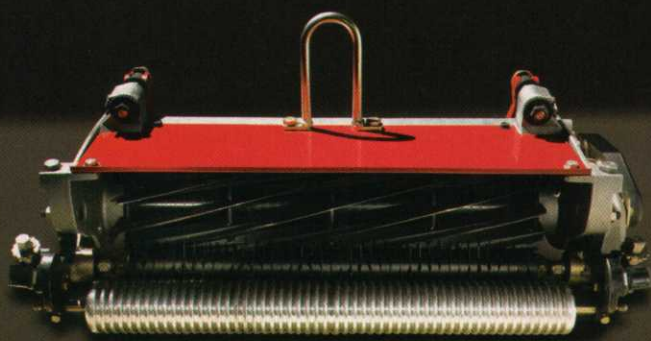


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# Impeding *Poa*

Velvet and other bentgrass varieties can stop the irksome annual bluegrass from invading greens

BY ANTHONY PLOPPI

**O**ver the past year, Monsanto and The Scotts Co. have received substantial attention for their efforts to produce the herbicide-resistant Roundup Ready creeping bentgrass that they say will allow superintendents to virtually eliminate *Poa annua*.

As Roundup Ready and other herbicide-resistant grasses are being touted as the wave of the future, researchers at Rutgers University are looking at a long-ignored variety as a way to prevent the incursion of *Poa*.

Beginning in the fall of 1998, Rutgers researcher James Murphy began a study to see which of the common turf types used on putting greens best resist the invasion of *Poa*.

As expected, the ongoing study found dense varieties such as A-4, G-2 and Century performed well, but the top grade went to an unexpected winner. "By far the best was velvet," Murphy says.

For long-time fans and proponents of velvet, considered possibly the finest putting surface in the world, the results come as no surprise. Its density and thickness make it perfect to thwart the advances of *Poa*.

One person who is not shocked by the finding is Skip Lynch, technical agronomist and bentgrass products manager for Seed Research of Oregon, which markets SR 7200, a popular velvet. When SR 7200 was introduced in the early 1990s, it was the first new seeded variety of bent to hit

*Continued on page 88*

The density and thickness of some bentgrass varieties make them perfect to thwart the advances of *Poa*.



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## Impeding *Poa*

*Continued from page 86*

the market in more than 30 years.

"It's really no secret. The healthier and denser you can create a stand of grass, the easier it is to keep out weeds from either above or below," Lynch says.

For the trials, Murphy grew test plots and subjected them to four conditions: no wear or compaction; mechanical wear; mechanical compaction; and mechanical wear and mechanical compaction. "What we're seeing is that wear is the biggest issue," he says.

But even with the wear, so little *Poa* made its way into the velvet stand that it could be removed by hand, Murphy says. He estimates the ratio was 90:10 in favor of velvet. What makes that fact even more interesting is that Murphy managed the plots in accordance with what creeping bent favors more than what a velvet management program favors.

While bent needs its food and water, velvet is best left alone. This practice of "benign neglect," as Lynch refers to it, is helpful to velvet and at the same time detrimental to the health of *Poa*.

"Basically, if you leave it alone, it does pretty well," Murphy says of velvet. "That rule of thumb is true. It prefers to be left alone."

There were also two minor surprises. Murphy said that while most of the newer and denser grasses fared well in the trial, L-93 finished in the middle of the pack. One of the older creeping bents, Putter, exceeded expectations, also finishing in the middle. Those two examples, Murphy says, show that there is not a 100-percent correlation between density and the ability to hold off *Poa*.

While Seed Research has been beating the drum about the attributes of velvets for 30 years, other companies are now trying to take advantage of the growing fan base. A handful of companies added velvet to their product line in the last few years.

Lynch estimates sales of velvet at Seed Research have grown from 12,000 pounds to 25,000 pounds in five years with much of that being exported to Europe, where superintendents have become proponents of the variety.

There is also a growing fan base in the United States. Lynch knows of at least two



Velvet

architects who have courses under construction and will seed with SR 7200.

One of those architects is Michael Hurdzan, of the Columbus, Ohio-based Hurdzan/Fry firm, whose Shelter Harbor CC in Westerly, R. I., will have velvet greens. The club is expected to open in 2004. It's fitting, since it was Richard Skogley, a professor at nearby University of Rhode Island, who collaborated with Seed Research in developing SR 7200.

Hurdzan says he's been looking to use velvet for a number of years, but could not convince course owners to go with it. "We never found anyone who honestly had the courage to try the stuff," he says.

Shelter Harbor, located about a mile from the ocean, should be a perfect fit, says Hurdzan, who is not convinced velvet is the right choice for every region, but grows very well in certain areas. He said the microclimate of the Rhode Island coast should be the perfect growing environment. The upscale national membership of Shelter Harbor, which Hurdzan says is used to playing on the best courses in the world, will appreciate velvet's attributes on the greens.

Making for smooth ball roll is not velvet's only outstanding attribute. Because the variety requires less fertilization and water, it's now the first recommendation of the University of Guelph in Ontario, Canada, because of its low environmental impact, Hurdzan says.

According to Lynch, the key to velvet gaining more acceptance among superintendents and architects is academia touting its attributes. "It's got to start at the university level that this is a good thing," he says. ■

So little *Poa annua* made its way into the velvet stand that it could be removed by hand, says Rutgers researcher James Murphy.

LARRY AYLWARD

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*Pioppi is a free-lance writer from Middletown, Conn.*



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# Mechanically Inclined

## Extending tool life

### With a Little TLC, Tools Will Last Longer

BY CURT HARLER

**K**ick a tractor and break your foot. Take out your frustrations on a trimmer or blower, and it's the machine that finishes in second place.

On the golf course, motorized hand tools take almost as much abuse as a duffer's pitching wedge.

Extending tool life starts with basics like reading the owner's manual and doing a daily checkup to be sure bolts are tight and cutting surfaces are sharp. But a lot of the problems are people-based.

Malcolm Stieneker, warranty manager with RedMax in Norcross, Ga., recalls a period when there were serious problems with guards breaking off trimmers. He says RedMax began investigating the matter and the workers using the trimmers.

"We found workers would get three or four feet from the truck and just toss the trimmers in," Stieneker says. "A 12-pound trimmer doesn't generate much force. Toss it once and it cracks. Toss it a second time, and it breaks."

As a result of that informal study, Stieneker's advice to superintendents is simple.

"Use a bit of TLC with equipment, and it will last a long time," he says. "Lay things on the ground or in the truck rather than tossing them." That will cut the number of broken shafts, guards and covers.

"The idea is to get the workers to take ownership of the equipment," notes Doug Cobb, instructional designer with Kawasaki in Irvine, Calif.

He suggests setting aside two hours on a Friday afternoon and having the equipment users do some light supervised maintenance: regapping plugs, sharpening blades and cleaning the machine.

"Teach the users how to listen to a machine — you can hear when something is wrong," Cobb says. "Then they can bring the unit into the shop before it fails," Cobb adds.

Kent Hall, product manager for power tools for Stihl in Virginia Beach, Va., says manufacturers always include a maintenance schedule in their manuals, and equipment owners need to follow recommendations in it. But the smart superintendent will go beyond the book and establish a formal maintenance procedure so workers can report problems to mechanics.

"Tag and communicate," Hall says. "That keeps a simple problem from becoming a major repair."

#### Build relationships

A lot of successful tool management is people-oriented.

"Get to know your dealer," Hall advises. "Develop a strong relationship with the parts and service department. Send a box of candy or a thank-you note now and then."

There are in-house relationships, too. "It is important to have regular sessions with the equipment operators and the people who do the maintenance," Hall says.

A good give-and-take session between mechanics and users will help both sides better understand how to

extend the life of tools. For example, having users do simple checks to be sure bolts are tight and in place and that air filter covers are on tight can go a long way.

Cobb recommends studying a machine's performance — the quality of the trim or the way it cuts a hedge or bush. "That's often the first warning that things are not right [if it's not trimming or cutting efficiently]," he says.

Field-user preventive maintenance can help the mechanics. While that owner's manual covers a lot of areas,

#### Tool Tips

- Read the owner's manual.
- Perform daily checkups.
- Treat your equipment with care.
- Perform regular maintenance.
- Develop a strong relationship with your dealer and service department.

talk to your local dealer about tips that deal with local conditions. If it's dusty, accelerate air-filter changes. In tough mowing conditions, pay more attention to blade sharpening.

"If all else fails, institute a 'you break it, you buy it' program," Stieneker says. "If a tool is broken deliberately or carelessly, the cost comes out of the worker's paycheck."

A last word of advice: If the motor does sputter, don't fling the machine into the nearest water hazard. Bring it into the shop for some TLC. ■

*Harler is managing editor of Golfdom's TurfGrass Trends.*