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Home Turf Advantage

Continued from page 80

that so the producer cannot have 50 acres of certified sod and sell 150 acres of certified sod," Pirkle adds.

► **Match soil types:** Sand-based golf courses shouldn't purchase sod that was harvested on clay. And although it's somewhat easier to place sand-based sod over clay because the water can still filter through the sand, it's generally best to match soil types.

"That's one of the reasons we do so much business in Florida," Pirkle says. "We're on sandy soils here (in Georgia)."

► **Test-ride the turf:** With more new varieties available than ever before, superintendents should implement test plots on their courses, Marman says. Management and membership can then evaluate each sample before buying.

"Put (the plots) in some really rough areas," Marman says. "Use worst-case scenarios and evaluate maybe 5,000 square feet over time. See how these grasses react before deciding to go wall-to-wall with one of them."

And don't be content with the status quo, Marman adds. "There are always better-suited varieties coming out for some tough golf courses," he says.

► **Think long-term:** Foresight is vital, Pirkle says. Whatever company is handling the initial job is the same company the superintendent will want to call upon for touch-up jobs over the ensuing two years.

"And there will be, in every sod job I've ever seen, a need to have some more sod after the project is complete," Pirkle says. "It's sort of a fact of life."

Pre-Installation

► **Level the surface:** The smoother the ground prior to laying turf, the better the grass will look in the long run. Ridges or bumps that aren't flattened prior to laying the sod will show through because the grass will follow that contour.

"It would surprise you how many times we get to an installation job and it's not prepped the way it's supposed to be," Pirkle says. "In some cases, we've had to delay job starts because they don't have it properly prepped."

► **Bottle the water:** In the immediate days before the start of a project, irrigation should be shut down, Marman says. Too many things can go wrong, which could lead to mud, which could prompt delays, which could mean spoiled turf.

"If somebody orders sod on Friday and wants it installed Monday morning, I always tell them to turn the irrigation off

Continued on page 84





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Home Turf Advantage

Continued from page 82

over the weekend," he says. "If they do overrun the irrigation, chances are that you show up Monday morning to soup."

That said, Marman does tout a light watering immediately before the sod hits the ground. "I suggest hitting it for a few minutes just to bring the soil temperature down slightly and cause more of a suction" between the ground and turf, he says.

Installation

► **Big roll vs. small roll:** Increasingly popular is "big roll" sod — rolls of sod that "look like giant jelly rolls," Pirkle says. They measure 350 square feet whereas traditional small rolls are 9 square feet.

Big rolls cover more ground in a shorter time but require a tractor with top-notch turf tires and a special side-shift installation attachment that prevents the tractor from running over the new sod.

One pratfall of big roll sod is the netting that holds the product together.

"You'll want the sod company to remove the netting while the sod is going down, and the sod needs to be fairly mature to be able to do that without falling apart," Marman says. "If you leave the netting on there, later on down the road you'll have some bare spots where that netting is exposed. That creates a bit of a liability on the owner's part."

► **Prevent seam lines:** Although big rolls lessen the presence of seams, the edges of sod should still be staggered, especially on slopes, to prevent seam lines running end to end or top to bottom.

► **Peg it and plank it:** Speaking of slopes, turf planted on extreme planes or the borders of bunkers should be stapled or pegged to the ground.

And on putting surfaces, plywood should be spread over the new turf to prevent workers — often on their hands and knees — from dimpling the new sod. Plywood also prevents tire damage when installing big roll sod, Marman says.

► **Pre-plant fertilization:** West Coast Turf always suggests a 6-20-20 pre-plant fertilizer, Marman says, but ultimately it's the choice of the superintendent whether that is done and, if so, if it's put down beneath or over the sod.

Post-Installation

► **Open the floodgates:** Once the sod is laid, irrigation must begin immediately. Thus, it's best to double-check the pump station and heads before the project ever starts, especially if it involves new construction or the renovation of an irrigation system.

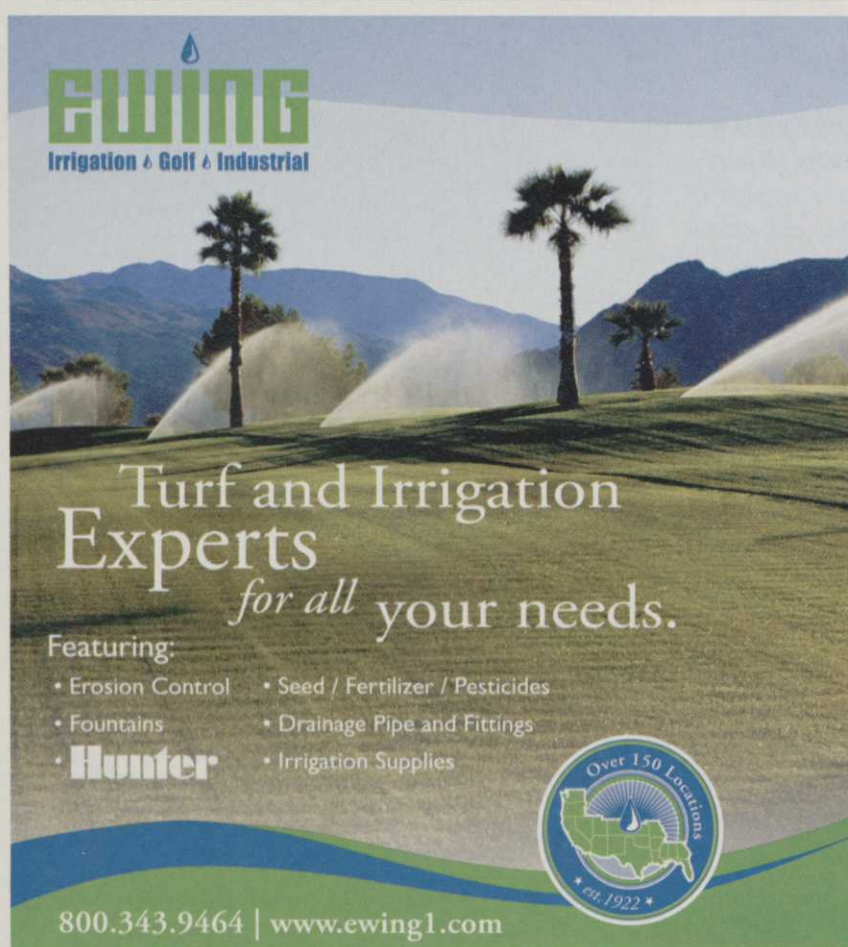
"The sod is not going to survive as well if you can't get timely water in," Pirkle says. "You don't want to start a project till you know for sure that your pump station is up and running."

The rule of thumb at West Coast Turf is to keep the top layer of sod moist by irrigating many cycles per day but for short durations. "You see people trying to deep water right after they put sod in, and it's not going to get you anywhere," Marman says. "We're talking five cycles a day, five minutes per cycle, maybe for the first couple of weeks. After that, maybe three cycles a day."

Of course, that can be difficult at a golf course. "Usually you're breaking a lot of the irrigation rules when you're working on a golf course," Marman says.

► **Delay mowing:** In most cases, turf should take root in two to three weeks, Pirkle says. Until then, mowing should not occur. "If it's not rooted down, you can actually pull up the edges of sod," he says.

With that in mind, Pirkle notes that Pike Creek maintains its sod at lower heights — from a half-inch to three-quarters inch. That prevents premature mowing, which can scalp the upper, green portion of the grass blade. ■



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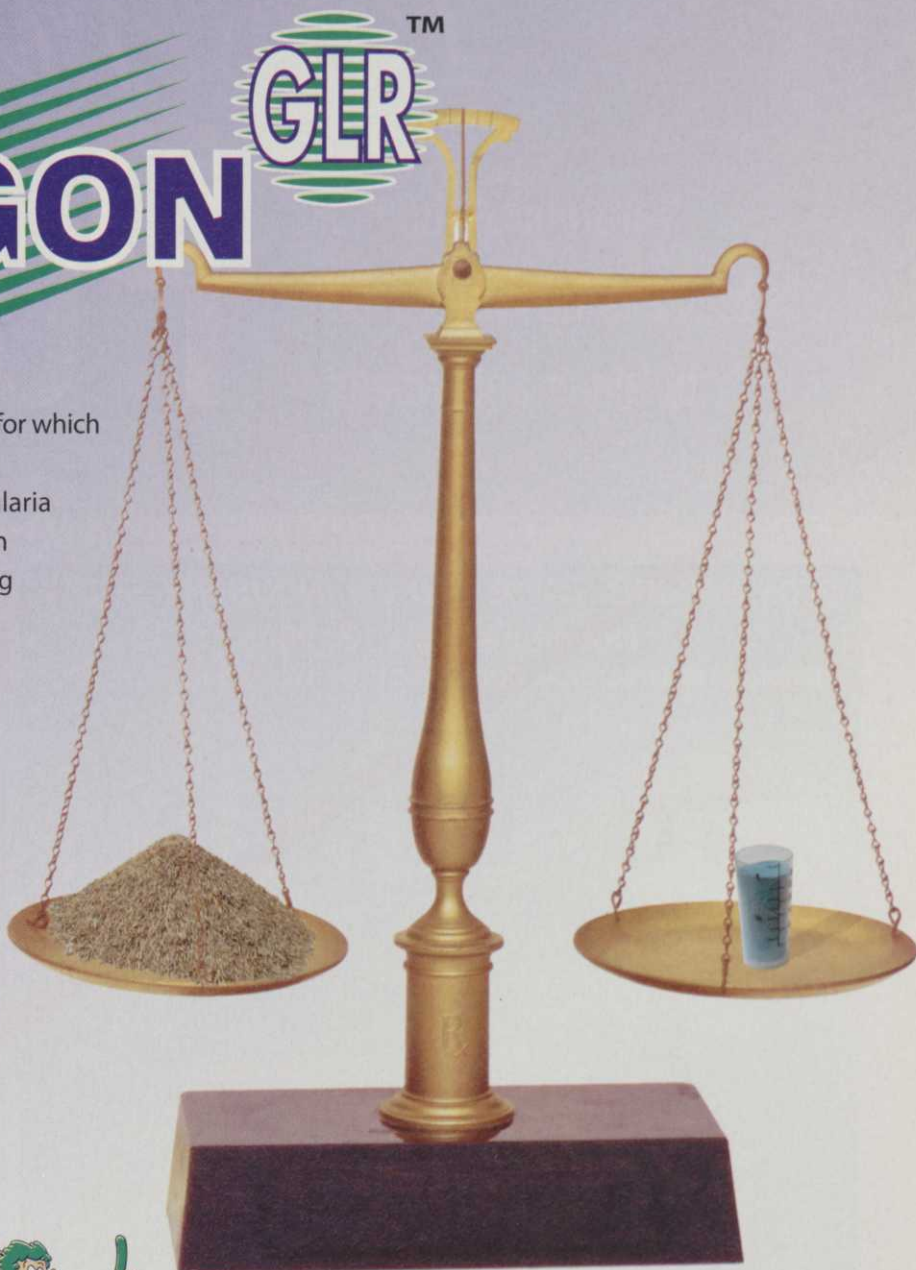
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By Larry Aylward, Editor in Chief

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

Continued on page 88



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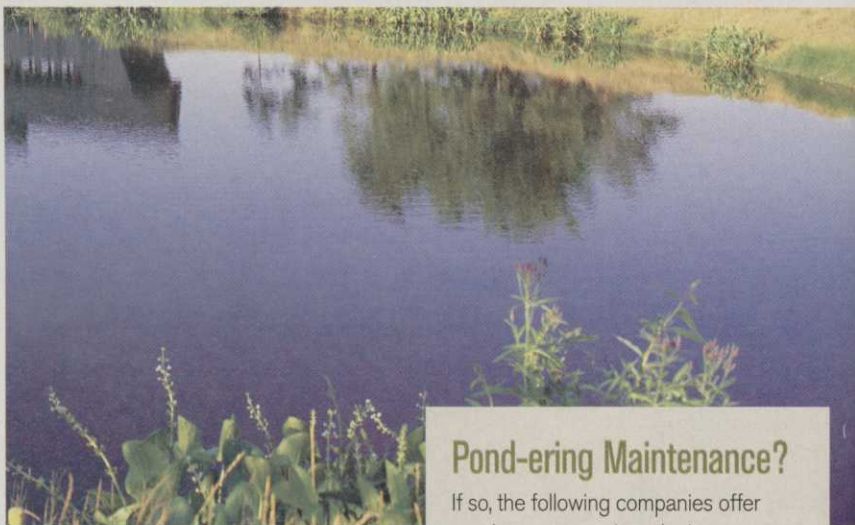
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Continued from page 86

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 algacide 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-

Continued on page 90

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Continued from page 88

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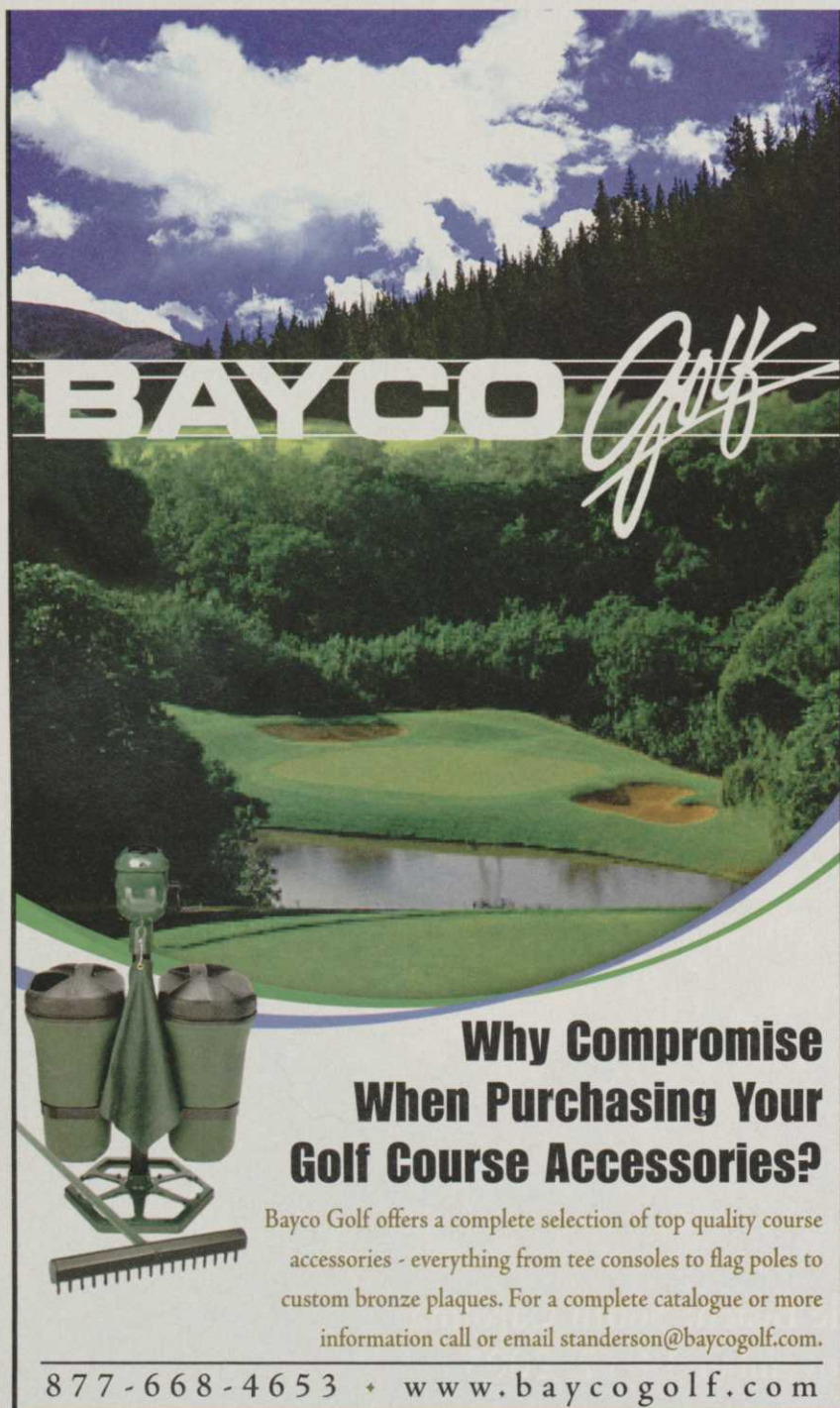
"After many failed attempts and lots of input from players as to how to get rid of it, I finally decided it was pretty and left it alone," Black says. "What a relief!"

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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