



Multi- *Fauceted*

When it comes to syringing greens,
different interpretations rein

By Thomas Skernivitz, Managing Editor

Jerry Broughton thought he had heard every synonym for syringing, if only because his course in Oklahoma runs the terminological gamut when it comes to irrigation techniques. Then the veteran superintendent came across a Canadian colleague who referred to the practice as “boarding.”

Boarding?

“I said, ‘What do you mean ‘boarding the green?’” Broughton recalls. “He says, ‘Well, I’m putting water where the sprinklers don’t put enough water.’ I said, ‘Oh, OK. We call that syringing.’”

“Different people,” Broughton notes, “have different ideas what syringing really is.”

Broughton’s definitions of syringing are wide-ranging, which, he admits, can lead to confusion throughout the superintendent ranks. At his course, Twin Hills Golf and Country Club, in Edmond, Okla., there’s definitely a difference when it comes to the three irri-

gation methods he most often uses — syringing, cooling and misting.

“Syringing” is what the Twin Hills crew does in the morning, when the high spots along the course haven’t received as much water from the irrigation system as the low spots. “With our temperatures here, you can have disease real easy if you get the low spots too wet,” Broughton says. “So what we have to do is go out with hoses and water the high spots.”

By afternoon, if the temperature has significantly risen, the Twin Hills staff will start “cooling” the course. Water is sprayed on the greens specifically to lower the ground temperature and prevent wilted turf.

Different altogether is “misting” — a technique Broughton, 56, uses when the temperature and humidity are high. Preferably a mist never touches the ground, in order to limit the possibility of disease. “What we’re trying to do in that situation is just put enough water in the air to cool the air tem-

perature over the grounds, so the ground temperature will drop without putting any water on it,” he says.

In cases of low humidity — 20 percent to 30 percent — and an escalating evapotranspiration rate, Broughton forgoes misting and instead syringes in the afternoon “because we’re losing so much moisture that your grass will dehydrate and burn.”

Superintendents in Oklahoma, Texas and Arkansas would probably recognize Broughton’s semantics, he says. But someone in Arizona, maybe even his own brother, James, a certified superintendent in Scottsdale, might be perplexed.

“Their humidity is so low all the time (in Arizona), they’re actually syringing every day ... and you hardly ever hear them saying ‘cooling’ or ‘misting’ out there,” Broughton says.

Although Broughton can live with the varied terminology, he worries that some superintendents, especially younger

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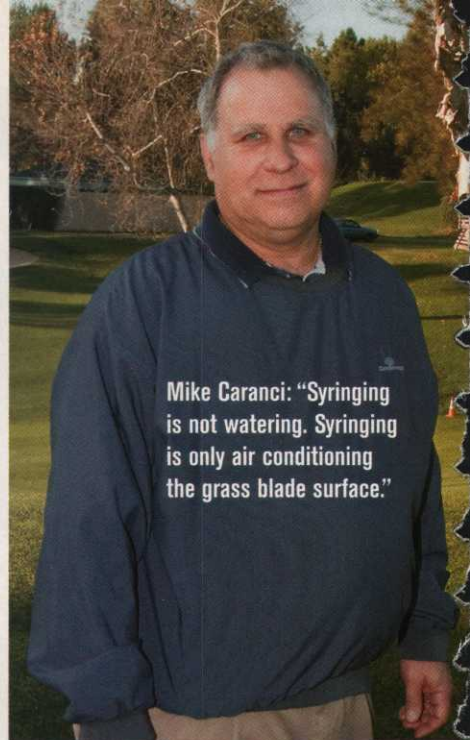
ones, don't know how to properly syringe or realize why they're doing it.

"The superintendent these days gets tied up in so many facets of his job that he doesn't get to stay in touch with his golf course and his greens particularly," Broughton says. "Even on my days off, I try to go by my greens and adjust the

water so I know every day that those things are OK. And I do that from the first of March until October."

At Candlewood Country Club in Whittier, Calif., superintendent Mike Caranci's definition of syringing is a little more exact and also clears up what he believes is a popular misconception.

"Golfers must understand that



Mike Caranci: "Syringing is not watering. Syringing is only air conditioning the grass blade surface."

syringing is not watering," he says. "Syringing is only air conditioning the grass blade surface."

Candlewood's 100 percent *Poa annua* greens are mowed at 0.07 inches throughout the summer months. When the air temperature reaches above 85 degrees Fahrenheit, Caranci applies two minutes of water on the greens in the early afternoon.

"Our surface temperature is 15 to 16 degrees higher than our atmospheric temperature," he says. "So if our temperature at 1 p.m. is 93, the surface temperature is 108 to 109, which means we will syringe the greens at 1 p.m. and possibly again two hours later, depending on the temperature."

In addition to the confusing terminology, syringing isn't the most rewarding job, and some superintendents might know it by names that aren't printable.

"I don't like syringing because it is a thankless job that the golfers haven't a clue about," says Scott Walsh, an employee of Four Seasons Equipment in Tupelo, Miss., and former superintendent at Natchez Trace Golf Course in Slaton, Miss. "You work your butt off to keep a green alive and still have people hitting 7 irons at you."

Jason Blacka can relate to the difficulties of syringing. The superintendent at Cimarron Hills Golf and Country Club in Georgetown, Texas, learned about the technique from professors and fellow

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superintendents as well as "some rather nauseating first-hand experience." But it's a necessary evil, he adds, considering Cimarón Hills is one of the few courses growing bentgrass as far south as mid-Texas.

Once the humidity drops below 50 percent, Blacka and his crew start to closely watch the greens. When syringing becomes necessary, they lightly mist the green using a hose, only applying as much water as it would take to totally dry in a minute or two.

"We aim not to keep the surface wet for prolonged periods," Blacka says. "This fits our philosophy of deep, infrequent watering to promote both hardier roots and allow the surface to stay drier for longer periods. It is not unusual for us to apply less water to our bentgrass greens than our bermuda tees, fairways and roughs in the summer."

To ensure that syringing doesn't result

Syringing can be a "nauseating" experience, Jason Blacka says, but it's a "necessary evil."

in prolonged dampness, Blacka carts out fans to aid in circulation.

"Textbooks will tell you that elevating the rate of transpiration in the plant will in turn help cool the plant and allow for nutrient uptake, which is very important in stressful times," Blacka says. "While this is a great theory, we only have three fans in place at the present time. (Fortunately), there are around a half dozen holes where the air circulation is excellent, and there is rarely a calm day in Texas."

Doug Witcraft, the superintendent at Musket Ridge Golf Club in Myersville,

Md., is another believer in close inspection. He monitors the air temperature and soil moisture of several of his greens.

"If the top quarter- to half-inch is drying out, I will run my irrigation system for a 3- to 5-minute cycle on all heads, just enough to cool the leaf surface and dampen the thatch," Witcraft says. "Then I let it dry out again before I do another 3- to 5-minute cycle. This seems to carry us through the peak heat of the day."

Meanwhile, isolated dry spots are hand-watered "when time and labor allows," Witcraft says. Wetting agents are also beneficial, he adds, as they "greatly reduce the amount of water we use and the amount of times we have to syringe."

At Amery (Wis.) Golf Club, superintendent Jeff Gajdostik says common sense is the best approach. "I don't have any secrets," he says. "Syringing is critical in the heat of the summer. If it's dry and hot, get the turf some water." ■

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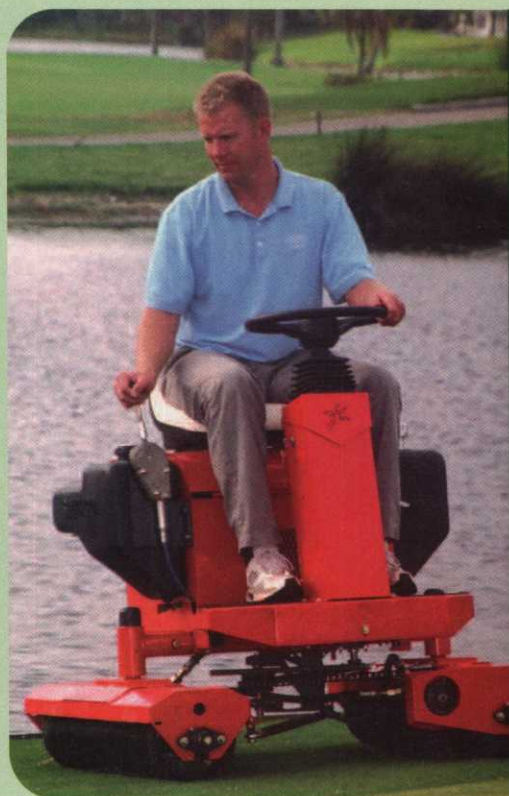
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Call in the Cavalry

Superintendent turns to USGA's
Turf Advisory Service for help
on golf maintenance front

BY CHARLIE FULTZ

As superintendents, sometimes we feel as if we're alone on a desert island. When everything is going smoothly and the golf course is in great shape, we are heroes and can do no wrong. But when the stresses of course maintenance set in, many times we realize we're on our own.

Few people, other than those of us who are intimately familiar with turf, understand the multitude of factors that can affect a golf course. Yet we are constantly compared to nearby courses on appearance

Problem

Few people, other than superintendents, understand the multitude of factors that can affect a golf course. So it's not like superintendents can consult just anybody when they need advice.

Solution

USGA's Turf Advisory Service can provide the sound advice that superintendents require. And that advice is tailored toward individual needs.

and playability. Such assessments are always unfair because the course down the street from us is different in so many ways. Still, we all face this type of scrutiny at some point.

What happens when your course is struggling with playing conditions that are out of your control, perhaps because of extreme weather (i.e., high humidity,

fluctuating temperatures and untimely rain) or intense pest pressures? Too often, unfortunately, such a scenario causes upper management to wonder, "Is my superin-

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As much as I'd like to help,

I cannot remove the asphalt indentation from your precious high spin ball. For you should know that cart paths are not your intended target anymore than ancient oak trees or aluminum siding on a condominium. Bring me your dirt, leaves, mud and grass and I will restore and refurbish your gem to its original luster. But even my 50+ years of experience has not come up with any advice for that travesty you call a swing.



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tendent doing everything he can to give me the best course under the conditions we are facing?”

There will come a time in almost everyone's career when that question will arise. It happens to the best of us and the worst of us. In fact, in golf course management, we can morph from being the best to the worst, in some eyes, in a matter of a year, a month or even a week. Let's face it: This is a business of "what have you done for me lately."

As superintendents, we may even begin to question our own

abilities, especially when everything we're doing just isn't getting it done. So, what can we do to answer the naysayers and help ourselves in the process?

Call in the cavalry — as in the United States Golf Association, which offers a Turf Advisory Service (TAS) that includes a visit by one of the USGA's turf agronomists. On this visit, any and all areas of golf course management can and will be discussed.

For instance, some things that can be discussed on such a visit include course conditions vs. budget allowances; equipment in use vs. equip-

ment needed; agronomic concerns (proper turf for course, greens construction, drainage issues); and ways to implement changes.

The best thing about a TAS visit is that it is tailored to each course's needs. It isn't a generic approach to golf course maintenance. Each course's individual needs are discussed and evaluated as they pertain to that course.

I've heard that some superintendents feel this service is a headhunting expedition (with the hunted head being their own). Superintendents who feel that way should perhaps question their own abilities and their chosen fields. If you've truly done all you can to prepare your course and still it fails, then you should be able to objectively self-reflect and admit that you could use some help.

The TAS provides an impartial review. The agronomists aren't there on your or the upper management's behalf. They are there on behalf of the golf course, serving as an intermediary to each side's questions and concerns. Each person has a say, and each can ask whatever he or she wants, knowing the question will be addressed.

At the end of the course visit (half day or full day), a discussion is held with all parties. In a matter of a few weeks, an official report about the visit comes from the USGA. It details all of the areas of concern presented, and it gives the reviewer's opinion on how to provide the best golf course you can provide.

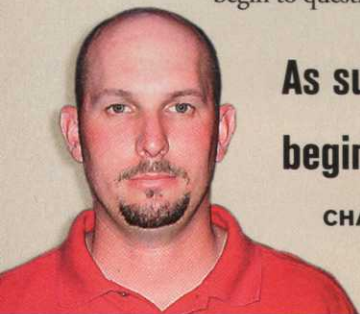
This is where the service is so valuable. Coming from a professional who sees hundreds of golf courses a year, it can be the most influential report ever conducted on your golf course. Most importantly, it can serve as a guideline on how to improve your course in both the short term and long term.

In 1998, I asked the USGA to come in and do a review of the course where I was working at that time. Although I felt I had done everything I possibly

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As superintendents, we may even begin to question our own abilities.

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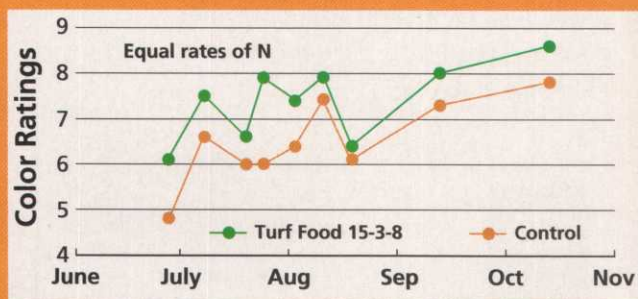
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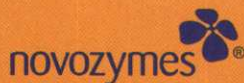
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could with our limited funds, staff and equipment, other people felt I hadn't done the best possible job. The general manager, a green committee member, the board president, another board member and I attended the TAS' half-day visit.

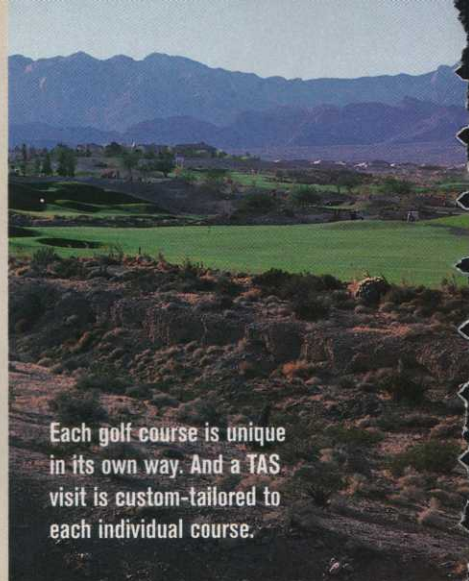
Afterward, upper management was able to realize that we were grossly under-financed, under-staffed and short on equipment. With the USGA report in hand, I was able to make substantial improvements to the entire golf operation. Increasing the budget and staffing, changing fairways from ryegrass to bermudagrass and removing some troublesome trees around greens and tees were just a few of the changes made. We were also able to begin plans for a bunker renovation, which began two years later.

These changes were most notable

when I asked the USGA to come back in 2000 for a quick visit. The agronomist was coming through my area and upon my request made it a point to stop in and review some of the changes that had been made per the TAS. The agronomist noted a huge change in the appearance of the golf course, and we were able to build on that for the future.

I find the TAS visits are among the best things I've ever done for myself and for my employer. They help me focus better on what's needed and give my employer the most for the money spent on the golf course. Together, we are able to give the members the most for their membership dues. Plus, we are able to lay out short-term and long-term plans for the golf course. It's a win-win situation for all of us.

Yes, in a way, each golf course is an island unto itself. Each is unique in its own way, just as the superintendent

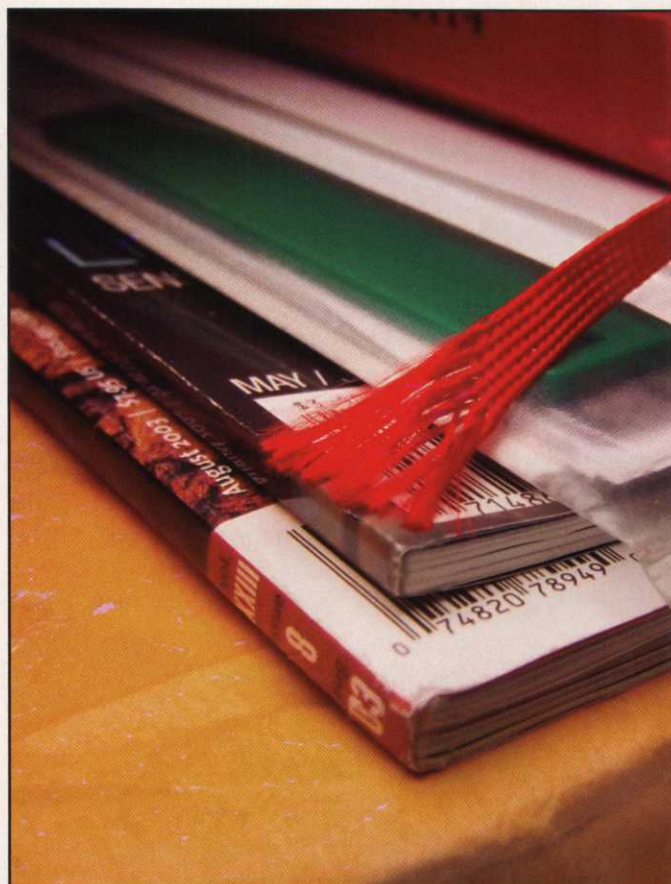


Each golf course is unique in its own way. And a TAS visit is custom-tailored to each individual course.

running it is unique in his or her way of maintaining it. Because the TAS service is custom-tailored to each individual course, using it can be one of the most beneficial things a superintendent, general manager or board does to improve and preserve their most vital asset. ■

Charlie Fultz is superintendent of Shenvalee Golf Resort and a member of Golfdom's Advisory Staff.

PHOTO BY: MIKE KLEMM



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