

Punching Holes In The Greens Now?

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Countless things we do in our lives can be considered preventative maintenance. From exercising a few hours a week to regularly changing the oil in the car, we're constantly doing something that reduces or eliminates future problems.

Preventative maintenance also is an integral part of successful golf course management. One essential practice, despised by golfers when applied to putting greens, is called aerification. Golfers view it as an inconvenient exercise that takes the greens out of play for a day, pulling cores from the greens and leaving holes that can affect putting for many days before healing. To add insult to injury, aerification is best done in many parts of the country during mid-summer, at the height of the playing season and when most greens are in prime condition.

A conspiracy, you say? Of course not, but unless you understand how important aerification is to producing healthy turf, such thoughts can be excused.

Aerification achieves three important objectives. It relieves soil compaction, it provides a method to improve the soil mixture around the highest part of a green's roots, and it reduces or prevents the accumulation of excess thatch.

When golfers by the thousand walk upon a green every month, the traffic causes the soil near the surface to become hard and compacted. The soil particles are pushed closer together until water and air have a difficult time moving to the miles and miles of small root hairs on every grass plant. When this happens the roots decline, the turf becomes weaker and diseases and other problems appear. Aerification pulls plugs from this compacted soil, allowing for an infusion of air and water that brings a resurgence of growth.

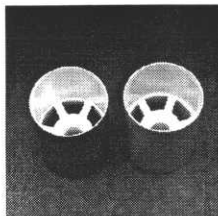
Older greens often are composed of soils with lots of silt, clay and fine organic particles and are prone to compaction. When greens are aerified with hollow tines and the cores are removed, it also allows filling these holes with sandy topdressing material that drains well and resists compaction. The periodic introduction of sand can improve a green's top layer' over time, a course might avoid or postpone the expensive rebuilding or renovation of its greens.

Finally, the growth of turf adds to the production of a layer of organic matter on the surface. This layer, called

thatch, is an accumulation of dead stems, leaves and roots. A little organic matter makes for a resilient green, but too much thatch invites diseases and insects. Topdressing with sand can prevent thatch buildup, and aerification is one of the best ways to reduce an existing layer and prevent an excess of thatch from becoming established.

There are many types of aerifying machines with different attachments that address different problems in the various stages of the life of a green. So the next time you're ready to scream when the aerifiers are brought on the course, remember that a little preventative maintenance produces the best greens over the long haul.

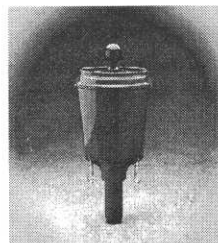
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