

Giving New Bunkers An Old Look

*A shortcut, stacked-sod technique can provide
a mature appearance for new bunkers.*

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Sand bunkers are an integral part of golf. They are hazards that catch errant shots, but their color and appearance also provide course definition and contrast. However, bunkers require a high input of manpower and resources for proper maintenance.

Today, as demands for improved bunker playability increase, more and more maintenance time and resources are needed to provide these conditions. Maintenance and golf activity impact the physical quality of a bunker. Over time, bunker faces deteriorate, bunker contours change and bunker drainage fails. Inevitably, the appearance and playability of the bunkers is severely compromised, and renovation may be needed to restore overall bunker quality. Often, the goal of bunker renovation is to restore the original architectural integrity of the bunkers.

At Rolling Green Golf Club, Springfield, Penn., bunker renovations were needed. The membership wanted the bunkers to be restored as closely to their original design as possible. More importantly, they wanted the bunkers to offer the playability and appearance of an aged feature in spite of recent renovation. With those thoughts in mind and armed with aerial photographs of the golf course from the 1920s and '30s, golf course superintendent John Gosselin set out to restore the bunkers to their original size and shape. Drainage problems were also addressed.

The initial phases of renovation were similar to those of any bunker project. The original contour and placement of the bunkers were estimated from the photographs, the bunkers were renovated, and drainage was installed. Then the regrassing of the bunker faces began. The goal was to provide an "eyebrow" effect on the top edge of the bunkers that could be seen from the teeing ground on par-three holes and from the landing area on par-four and par-five holes. The eyebrow was needed to prevent the appearance of a clean, new edge around the bunker. It was important that the finished product was consistent with the original character of the golf course.

The decision was made to use stacked Kentucky bluegrass sod to create the eyebrow. Rather than using full pieces of sod, the sod was cut into narrow strips about 6" wide. A soil ledge approximately 10" in width was created to provide the initial footer to begin stacking sod. Each strip of sod was positioned as closely to the outside edge of the

ledge as possible, one layer at a time. With each layer, soil was added and compacted between the sod and native soil. Tight compaction of the soil behind the sod was imperative to prevent the sod from shifting. Sod layers were added until the desired appearance was achieved. The number of layers varied from bunker to bunker. As few as three up to as many as 20 layers were used, depending upon the characteristics of individual bunkers.

The final step was to position a full piece of sod perpendicular to the stacked sod along the edge of the bunker. The perpendicular sod pieces provided a cap for the stacked sod. The ends of these sod pieces were folded under to provide the finished product and prevent the end of the sod from drying out. As the sod began to grow, the appearance of stacked sod was lost, resulting in the bushy "eyebrow" appearance. The result was nicely finished bunkers that appeared to have been in place for several seasons.

This technique is not for everyone. Its application depends upon the style of bunkering desired. Also, it is not known how quickly the narrow strips of stacked sod will deteriorate and require replacement. Nevertheless, this unusual technique results in newly renovated bunkers that don't look new.

Prior to renovation, the bunker edges were deteriorating. The bunkers had also become shallower as new sand was added over the years.

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Even prior to sand installation, the results of the bunker renovation provided a striking improvement over the old bunkers.

After renovation, the bunkers were slightly larger and deeper with distinct faces as a result of the stacked sod method employed. More importantly, the finished product fit in with the overall character of the golf course. ✂