

Control Those Shrinking Greens

Pay close attention to avoid those slow, incremental changes

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Have you ever noticed how the size of a putting green seemingly changes over a period of time? We all realize that putting greens do not actually grow or shrink. However, because of fast growth and frequent mowing, this concern about putting green size is real.

At many courses, seasonal workers are employed to mow putting greens, and many of these employees may not have worked on a golf course before. Prior to mowing that first green, each crew member is instructed on the entire procedure. This includes lowering and raising the mower when entering and exiting the surface; turning (off the collar!) cutting in a straight line and, the final step, the cleanup pass or passes.

During the training process, mowing a green can be an eye-opening experience. The cleanup pass is always nerve-racking for new employees because they do not want to make a mistake. When their training is complete and crew members are on their own, the last thing they want to do is scalp the collar. To minimize the chances of this occurring, they tend to mow just inside the green/collar perimeter, and over time the putting green surface area can shrink. If this pattern is left unchecked, collars tend to widen while greens become smaller.

Some facilities do not rely on seasonal help. Rather, they opt to employ part-time (nine or ten months) or full-time workers to meet their staffing needs. Crew members are cross-trained in many jobs so that daily course preparation can be completed. But even well-trained and reliable crew members tend to err on the conservative side when completing the cleanup passes for each green mowed. Again, the greens may begin to shrink.

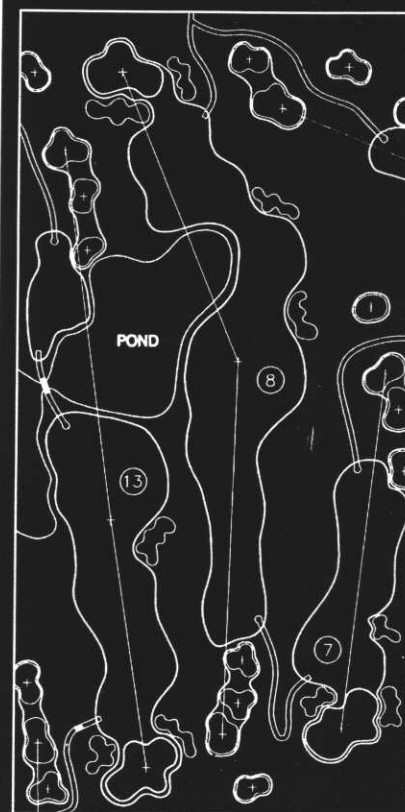
Jim Loke, CGCS from the Bent Creek Country Club, Lititz, Pennsylvania, devised a method to address the shrinking green problem. Initially, two paint guns were used to mark a consistent collar width around each green. The paint guns are held together by PVC pipe. It produces a rigid marking tool that allows Scott Chaffee, Assistant Superintendent, to check the 36" collar width. The marking apparatus has since been modified to allow the process to be more efficient and user friendly.

The procedure is performed periodically during the season, and if the shape of the green being marked has not changed, then there is no need to paint an edge. However, if major adjustments are needed, they are made in the fall. This tool provides a fast and accurate method for maintaining the shape of the putting surface and a consistent collar width to control those shrinking greens.

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(Editor's Note: KEITH HAPP is an Agronomist in the Mid-Atlantic Region of the USGA Green Section. Reprinted from the USGA Green Section Record 1996 March/April Vol 34(2): 12-13.)

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