

FAIRWAY CLIPPING REMOVAL WITH TORO 84'S
ADVANTAGES AND COSTS

Roger Barton
Blythefield Country Club
Grand Rapids, MI

Club History

Blythefield Country Club is located north of Grand Rapids. We are an 18 hole Private Club with a very active Golfing Membership.

We have a high percentage of our membership that are low to medium handicap. So you know their demands are high for good playing conditions.

Our turf on the fairways is primarily 80% to 90% annual bluegrass which demands a lot of time and material for our fairway program. I have always been one to experiment with new methods of turf care, and this removal of clippings appealed to me for my problem fairways.

For three years I have been expanding the area in front of the greens, that I mow with a Greensmaster at 3/8 of an inch. We now mow close to 90 ft. approaches to the Green. This keeps the fairway mower off the critical area of turf and eliminates compaction, caused by turns. We mark the approach area off with a white line to keep golf carts off as well as fairway mowers. Removing clippings in this area for three years has shown the members quality turf. We have expanded this idea with a Turf Pro 84, for our par 3's that are hard to turn on with big fairway mowers. We also mow one par 4 and one par 5 in this method.

Advantages

Some of the big advantages to clipping removal are appearance, playability, less compaction, with less compaction fewer wet spots, stands heat stress better and less thatch build up.

Our fairway appearance hasn't been bad in the past, because we mow fairways in the evening when ever possible. We have mowed with the 84 in the morning, after the fairways have been dew whipped. We found more problems handling wet clippings than dry ones.

The fairways we mow with the 84, we start mowing 3:00 p.m. and work till 9:00 p.m. The rest of the fairways are cut with the Parkmaster starting at 5:00 p.m.

The playability of the fairways is great because the ball sets up very well. My approaches are cut at 3/8" but I didn't choose this height for fairways. We mow our fairways a tight 5/8". I find the average player to prefer this height. Some of our players have trouble with the 3/8" cut in front of the greens.

Within one month of removing clippings I noticed a lot tighter turf, better roots and a much healthier plant. I think we have less compaction with the Turf Pro 84, and with the clipping removal we seem to be getting better water penetration. This in turn helps us to have fewer wet spots.

In relation to heat stress we have a theory to what is happening to the plant from clippings. With the clippings laying on the turf, they don't decompose fast enough, and they create a higher temperature near the crown of the plant. This situation creates the need for more syringing. You look at the two fairways with a hand lens: the fairway with clippings

looks thick and matted; the fairway with clippings removed looks clean, sturdy and has better color.

As far as the thatch build up is concerned we have been on a deep verticutting and aerifying program. We have the thatch problem under control, at least down to 1/2" or less. Clipping removal carries this one step further.

Disadvantages

Higher labor cost because these fairways have to be mowed every other day. I want to stress this point. The clipping removal becomes a lot harder task, if you try to mow just three times a week. Mowing every other day involves one weekend day of mowing at premium rate of pay. More fertilizer is needed on the fairways when the clippings are removed. We found it took 1/2 pound more of nitrogen, per season and more potassium. Our present nitrogen program is 3 1/2 pounds of N per year. With clipping removal on these six fairways and with our lighter soil, we will have to go to 4 lbs. of N per season.

Our primary problem was dollar spot on the fairways where we removed clippings. The worst problem showed up in September.

Another disadvantage is the disposal of grass clippings. We are fortunate at Blythefield to have enough acreage. We have three separate dump sites on the golf course that are way out of play.

Cost

In our case at Blythefield we are mowing six fairways. We only had to purchase one Turf Pro 84, The average price now would be \$15,000.00 figuring baskets and rollers. The Club has \$1,000.00 in material for trailers. For the labor, I had one part time man mowing with the 84 for 23 hours per week; labor for this operation runs about \$2,200.00. The total the first year would run around \$18,200.00 if you limited your mowing to what one machine would handle.