



Building Putting Greens On A Firm Foundation



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There are many ways to build a putting green. Construction methods vary widely from the well-defined, science-based recommendations of the USGA method to simply shifting some topsoil around for a makeshift backyard putting green. Putting greens are by far the most important features on a golf course, so it makes good sense to build them on a firm foundation of sound science and field experience.

The USGA first published its Recommendations for a Method of Putting Green Construction in 1960. At the time, golf courses were struggling to keep pace with the demands of an increasingly popular sport. The golf industry needed smooth, sustainable putting greens that could tolerate heavy play and quickly regain normal playing conditions after wet weather. The USGA utilized university research and field experience to develop a method for building putting greens that could be used successfully throughout a wide range of climates and locations. The USGA Recommendations are periodically reviewed and updated to utilize greater scientific understanding and new materials or techniques that are proven to increase reliability or decrease construction costs.

High quality, dependability and consistency are rarely inexpensive commodities. Unfortunately, the USGA Recommendations are sometimes modified during construction to cut costs. Shortcuts and missing ingredients can ruin a great recipe; just guess what happens to your favorite birthday cake when you leave out the butter, milk or eggs. Modifications to the USGA Recommendations can yield similar flops.

Of course, building a USGA green does not guarantee a great putting surface. A well-constructed house built on a solid foundation can deteriorate rapidly with inadequate



maintenance. Similarly, day-to-day management and the growing environment have considerable influence on putting surface quality and consistency. Shade, restricted air circulation and inadequate organic matter – i.e., thatch – management are common causes of poor putting surface that have nothing to do with how the green was constructed.

No doubt, there are examples where knowledgeable, experienced turf managers provide golfers with superior putting surfaces despite the limitations of poorly constructed greens. Hopefully, they are compensated well to discourage flight to greener pastures, because an unreliable foundation eventually compromises turf quality.

Today's golfers crave consistency and golf course superintendents work hard to meet player expectations for near perfection, which is awfully difficult to achieve considering the game is played outdoors. Fortunately, consistency and sustainability are key attributes of properly managed USGA greens. Golf facilities that choose to modify the USGA Recommendations when building putting greens may save a little time or money, but they risk unpredictable results and potentially unhappy golfers. Instead, why not take full advantage of more than 50 years of research and experience and place the most important features of any golf course on solid ground to ultimately achieve greater golfer satisfaction.