



Striped mowing patterns can be visually appealing, but excessive striping can detract from visual definition and requires more time and resources to complete.

DEFINING DEFINITION

BY USGA GREEN SECTION

Striped mowing patterns are a common sight on golf courses; but how is striping done and does it impact playing conditions?

Turf on a golf course needs water, food and sunlight to survive. It must also be mowed regularly to create the desired playing conditions. Greens, surrounds, fairways, tees and rough are mown at precisely measured heights on a frequent basis to provide good playability, but it is not just the frequency and quality of mowing that sets a golf course apart from other turfgrass areas. How the operators mow the turf also helps to define each of the playing surfaces.

The striping of golf course playing areas has been done for decades, with a light stripe occurring when turf is mowed away from the viewer and a dark stripe occurring when turf is mowed toward the viewer. Mowing patterns provide excellent definition for each playing surface, but is this definition truly needed throughout the entire golf course?

Putting Greens

Mowing is completed in multiple directions each week to avoid issues with grain and to spread out mower traffic. Although uncommon, mowing in the same direction on putting greens for an extended period can create permanent grain that is extremely difficult to remove. It can also create traffic patterns that lead to turf damage. The answer for putting greens is always to mow in multiple directions each week, with the resulting striped pattern providing very good definition.

Green Surrounds

The areas around putting greens are mowed with less frequency than the putting greens. However, it is still important to change the mowing direction to avoid grain issues. Some courses choose to create stripes in their green surrounds while others will mow in one continuous direction that does not create stripes. Either method can be effective as long as the mowing direction is varied on a regular basis.

Tees

Teeing surfaces are the only part of a golf course where grain is not a major concern, thus tees can be mowed with or without stripes.



Mowing fairways in a “50-50” pattern can provide excellent definition and may reduce mowing time and traffic damage.

Fairways

Fairway striping is very common and must be completed in multiple directions to avoid grain. Grain on a fairway can impact club takeaway and follow through and may influence ball roll. The key is to change mowing directions as much as possible regardless of the pattern chosen. It is also important to understand that more time is needed to mow fairways in a striped pattern and more mower damage may be done to the roughs due to the numerous sharp turns that are required. Mowing fairways in a “half and half” pattern, where half the fairway appears light while the other half appears dark, can be more efficient and reduces the amount of turning required in the rough. However, it is still important to vary the mowing direction in this pattern to avoid grain and traffic issues.

Roughs

All of the playing surfaces need definition, with the roughs providing the frame for each hole. However, striping roughs can result in a visual overload when the fairways are also striped. Grain in the roughs also poses a major playability issue. In an effort to keep players focused down the middle of the golf course, many golf facilities choose to avoid complex mowing patterns in the roughs.

The definition of playing surfaces is an important part of golf. When used wisely, mowing patterns enhance the playing experience and visual quality of a golf course.