



Well-maintained research sites are not only helpful for identifying the best options among those being tested, they can also be good sales tools.

IF IT'S WORTH DOING, IT'S WORTH DOING WELL

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One of the biggest head scratchers I see on golf courses is a research plot that is unmaintained and haggard. Sometimes, it's unclear if you're looking at a research area or if someone just put the wrong type of grass down in a quasi-geometric pattern. Unless you're studying options for naturalized areas, this type of research plot is not a good sales pitch.

What green committee, golf board or course owner is going to think transitioning to ryegrass fairways is a good option when the trial plots are thin, weed-infested and loaded with clippings? It might be the most sensible option to make the change, but it becomes a difficult sell when your research plots do not look good.

Or what about a potential bunker sand change? Do you have a practice bunker with different types of sand in it? Are they clearly marked and raked regularly? If the research bunker isn't well maintained, what evidence do the decision-makers have that will instill confidence that an investment in new bunker sand will mean the bunkers on the course will be better?

Let me offer up four tips for success on research plots at your course:

Choose your site with care.

Who is your audience? Do you want everyone to see what's being tested? Sometimes, the answer is no. Selecting a site that caters to your intended audience is always best.

Maintain it at, or above, the standard for the rest of the course.

Whether the research site is front and center or tucked away somewhere, at some point you're going to show someone the work. Devote the resources necessary to keep the research area in top condition. Not only will it show your audience that you know what you're doing, it will be the best representation of whatever you're trying to research.

Use signage.

When appropriate, include easy-to-understand signs or labels that explain the research and identify the various options. If the site is in play, signage may not be feasible. In this case, make sure to explain the project via newsletter or golf shop posting. Keeping golfers up to date about what is going on and the reasons the trial work is being done helps eliminate surprises later on when decisions and their potential financial implications come to bear.

Take pictures.

This can't be stressed enough. Superintendents are looking at their course all day, every day. It is difficult to remember what something looked like yesterday, let alone three months ago. Pictures are the best way to see and display the evolution of the research being done. If possible, take pictures at the same time of day so sun angle and lighting can be consistent. Pictures are also critical to any eventual presentation on why a change should be made.

If you're going to go through the effort of doing research, do it well.



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