

by Harold Vaubel

Super finds 'Instant Spring' with grass paint

During winter days, many of us begin to dream of an "instant spring" which would bring to life a seemingly eternal barren landscape.

Some superintendents are no longer dreaming. Some are now experiencing "instant spring."

Instant Spring can't manipulate the date of the vernal equinox, bring warm weather sooner, or shift the polar ice caps around so northern climates bask in equatorial sunshine. The Instant Spring product, however—it's a grass paint of sorts—can at least turn things greener sooner.

Some major U.S. golf courses, particularly in the West where people keep a sharp eye on water use, have adopted the earlier-than-seasonal green.

The use of Instant Spring makes sense for reasons of conservation and economics as well as wintertime aesthetics. It lessens the need for intensive wintertime irrigation.

For over 10 years, I have watched this "Greening of the Sun Belt" phe-

nomenon as I managed or helped manage courses in the Southwest, beginning my career as an assistant golf course superintendent at the Good-year Golf and Country Club in Litchfield Park, Ariz.

I held the same position at the Tucson National Golf Club, then moved up to superintendent positions at the Albuquerque Country Club in New Mexico and the Desert Forest Golf Club in Carefree, Ariz. I am currently superintendent at TPC Starpass in Tucson.

During the years I've had the chance to peruse the "greening by man" effort and it's certainly worthwhile in aesthetic terms.

Even regions where water is plentiful and applied liberally still experience brown, dry grass during midwinter. Use of Instant Spring makes sense in most places if the goal is to keep things looking at least a little greener than Mother Nature herself would provide during wintertime's dormancy.

What golfer after all, is not drawn to the sport partially—if not mainly—because of the chance to exist for a time in a "world of green?"

To achieve that green using Instant Spring, you simply paint the grass.

Wellborn Paint Manufacturing Co. of Albuquerque developed the product which reflects two great interests of company president Fred Wellborn: painting and golf.

He started his paint company in the middle of the Sun Belt—Albuquerque—in 1947 and built the company into a large regional manufacturer of paints and coatings with the help of chemical engineers, tinters, and energetic marketers.

Many Wellborn products are formulated specially for the Southwestern climate, with its long, hot summers, intense sunshine, low humidity, and occasional winter blizzards.

Wellborn found that the Sun Belt offered many days per year of good golfing weather. In fact New Mexico receives sunshine seven of every 10 winter days. Only the green was missing.

I was familiar with Wellborn and the idea of painting golf course fairways during the early 1970s. My first experience with the product was at Desert Forest Golf Club, one of *Golf Digest's* top 100 courses, in 1981.

Though I've seen applications



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done various ways, I use two coats with a 20:1 water to acrylic base ratio in the first coat, and a 30:1 ratio in the second.

As always, application ratio varies with grass type and density, and region of the country.

I don't spray everywhere—just the fairway area. We mix ferrous sulfate in before spraying at a 10 lbs. per acre rate. The use of ferrous sulfate gives a better defined area and a more visually-pleasing result.

I believe the use of paint products in the winter, whether under the Instant Spring label or not, has been a visual plus.

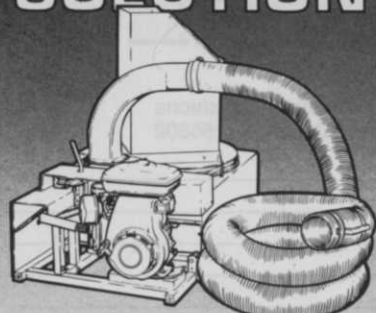
Initially, the desire for as much year-round greenery as possible came mainly from the golfers but superintendents who have gone this route have found some other benefits as well. In my own case, I found some unexpected positive results:

- A better playing surface. Rye-grass is often used to keep things green for a longer period of time. However, it's a rough, uneven playing surface. By using other grasses that go dormant sooner than rye, we can have a smoother surface.

- Cost savings. Products which bring spring to the stage earlier than the calendar does also help out financially.

Compare the cost of seeding and maintaining rye-grass, which I estimate can run as much as \$900 to \$1,000 an acre, with the \$100 an acre it takes to apply two coats of "Instant Spring" at the application ratios I previously mentioned.

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