

On 'pines' and needles

Raven Golf Club used 46,000 bales of pine straw and planted 5,300 black pines to provide golfers with a different experience in a desert climate.

by LESLEE JAQUETTE

Pine needles are a golfer's friend, not a foe at Raven Golf Club at South Mountain in Phoenix.

They cover the ground, even in wind and rain—at a cost that's in line with the cost of other covers. As an added bonus, golfers can hit off them.

Raven designers David Graham and Gary Panks used 46,000 bales of pine straw over 38 acres of rough and transition areas. At a cost of \$240,000, Corbin's Baled Pine Straw of McDonough, Ga., trucked in 50 loads of pine needles to a course that aspires to look like Augusta.

"We wanted something that completely covered, and that looked completely different," says Ty Schrock, Raven's golf course

superintendent, who notes the new course has already been ranked second in the state.

"We wanted our course to be a bit of the Midwest in the Southwest. The pine trees and pine needles make the difference."

Also, the needles, which come naturally matted together, inhibiting erosion, are basically fire resistant. Because of the region's dry, sometime-searing weather, this is essential. Since the needles are also acidic, they naturally inhibit weed growth.

Along with covering a good part of the course in pine straw, the design called for planting 5,300 good-sized black pine trees and 48,000 plants, including 22,000 buckets of purple deer and buffalo clumpgrass. The trees and grasses enhance the non-desert look.

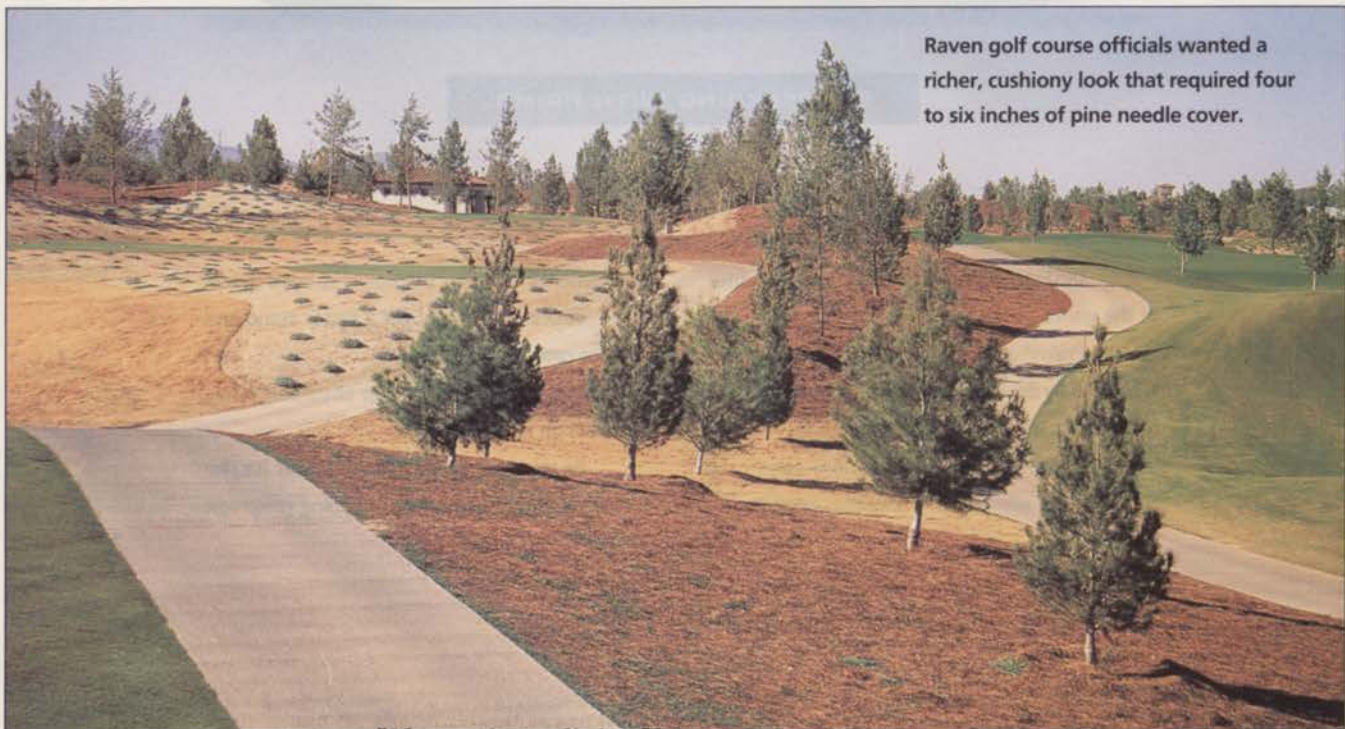
Cost & maintenance

The pine needles cost \$3 per bale when shipped around the Atlanta area, to \$7 per bale when shipped to California. A bale typically covers 50 sq. ft. Corbin's company installs the pine straw for an additional \$1.50 per bale, which Corbin says is a bargain since his staff can spread it more efficiently than persons unfamiliar with the product.

Schrock admits that the needles are difficult to maintain on mounds and in high traffic areas, where it must be raked often. Schrock estimates that 120 man-hours are spent each week raking pine straw. Once the pine trees are more mature and shed more of their own needles, costs will go down substantially.

"The cost isn't the biggest factor in this crazy market," says Schrock, speaking of the Phoenix/Scottsdale area. "We don't mess around because the point is to look different."

For more information on Corbin's Baled Pine Straw, phone (800) 957-1411. □



Raven golf course officials wanted a richer, cushiony look that required four to six inches of pine needle cover.