



▲ **Larry Schlippert:**
Keep accessories clean
and dry for golfers.

Cultural work makes fairways greens-like

by DEBBIE CLAYTON

Managing fairways that look and play like greens is a challenge Larry Schlippert faces and meets on a daily basis as superintendent at Commonwealth National Golf Club in Horscham, Pa.

Schlippert aerifies fairways anytime from the first week of September to the last week of October, working around outings and special events. He uses a water-cooled Cushman, run in first gear at a low-range idle. He keeps a 1½- to 2-inch pattern, bringing up so many cores that you can hardly see the grass afterward. After the cores dry, he goes over them with a Brouwer five-gang verticutter with the drive gears turning in reverse so the blades are spinning backward.

"We keep going over it until the ¾-inch plugs are pulverized," Schlippert says. "Then we drag fairways three or four times with a section of 12-foot cyclone fencing mounted on a two-inch pipe. After dragging, the remaining debris is blown off the fairways into piles and picked up to limit any bentgrass contamination in the rough.

"If fairways are damaged by the verticutter, we'll topdress them with a seed/soil mixture. We then fertilize with a high N-source fertilizer, water it in and don't mow until the turf has grown well above the soil deposited on top to minimize pick-up."

Commonwealth was designed by Arnold Palmer, and is ranked third in the Philadelphia area (behind Pine Valley and Merion, two of the top-ranked courses in the U.S.).

"Palmer tried to keep the course as maintenance-free as possible without ruining course amenities," notes Schlippert, who joined Commonwealth during construction in 1988. "He incorporated many of the natural features on the property, such as wetlands, ponds and tall oak stands. But he also moved huge amounts of soil to create contour and drainage. Most of the mounding is in the roughs and outer areas, though some holes are severely mounded to distinguish them from the office buildings that are part of the golf course. Greens have only subtle undulation with no severe breaks or mounding."

Relatively flat greens mean more usable space for pin placement and easier maintenance. Whereas greens are 100 percent Pennncross bentgrass, fairways, tees and approaches have a combination of Emerald and Penneagle bent. Schlippert cuts greens at ¼-inch, other bentgrass areas at ⅜-inch, and the bluegrass/rye/fescue roughs between 2 and 4 inches. The course has relatively few trees in some areas, so the deep rough makes a good penalty and helps keep weeds to a minimum. Deep roughs also reduce soil temperatures and water needs.

A single spring pre-emergence applica-

tion of Dimension is Schlippert's entire fairway herbicide program. "I'm leery of skipping our crabgrass control because we aerify fairways so aggressively each fall," he explains. "We bring up so much soil that it's bound to contain crabgrass seed. Bentgrass tends to be thatchy and matty, so if we don't aerify aggressively, we'll have thatch build up like crazy. As it is, we only have ¼- to ⅜-inch of thatch on fairways seven years after establishment."

Aggressive on Poa

Schlippert is a strong advocate of plant growth regulators (PGRs). For the last several years, he's used Cutless plant growth regulator at the rate of 1½ lbs./acre four times each year to reduce *Poa annua* infestations, enhance turf color and reduce mowing. To encourage the bentgrass to fill in where Cutless weakens poa, Schlippert fertilizes 10 days before he applies the PGR, so that the products work together.

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Continuous cart paths along the fairways at Commonwealth reduce turf traffic pressure.

He broadcasts granular high-content nitrogen fertilizer at the rate of 6 to 8 lbs. per year, split among four applications between May and October. Since bentgrass is most aggressive during summer months when heat and humidity are high, he intensifies this program in June, July and August.

"The PGRs stimulate lateral turf growth while inhibiting upright growth," he observes. "The benefits are reduced mowing and reduced clippings. At times, we could mow just once a week, but always mow Mondays and Fridays to keep up appearances. We have been catching clippings on fairways every cut since the course opened in June, 1990. The PGRs also create a denser turf canopy which helps reduce weed infestations. PGRs do not reduce or eliminate poa seedhead formation, but their application will retain the seeds much longer and actually extend the seed formation process. This year, I switched to Scott's TGR because it's much harsher on the poa than Cutless. Most people have so much poa they can't afford to hurt it, but my fairways range from 85 to 95 percent bentgrass and I don't want any more poa than I already have."

The downside to using PGRs is that dis-

ease symptoms last longer because turf takes longer to recover. In fact, any outside influences on the turf will last much longer, such as heat stress, insect damage, divots and ballmarks.

"When you make your first application," says Schlippert, "how frequently you apply and what rates you use depend on the weather."

Once disease symptoms appear, Schlippert rotates a variety of fungicide products. Daconil, Chipco 26019 and Banner are his main defenses against brown patch. Subdue, Aliette and Banol are used to control pythium. And it helps to know the trouble spots.

"For example, we apply an insecticide for white grubs and black turfgrass aeteniis on greens and tees each year, based on weather conditions," Schlippert says. "I can look at past years' records and almost guarantee you those applications are no more than five or 10 days apart each year. Having a superintendent and crew on board for a long period actually saves a club money over the long run."

Water management plays a key role in Schlippert's disease management program. He hand-syringes fairways during mid-summer, monitoring hot spots and watering accordingly, using Surfside wetting agent in pellet form to aid his hand-water-

Common problem, new solution

With 13 lakes and ponds, Commonwealth is a "magnet" for geese and waterfowl. But last year Schlippert reduced their numbers by staking fishing line along the contours of the ponds about 18 inches from shore. He left the metal stakes about 14 inches above the water and 20 to 30 feet apart. Two strands of 50-pound monofilament fishing line were stretched between the stakes at 9 and 13 inches above the water. Geese like to land in the water and walk out to shore. The fencing prevents them from getting their feet on the ground, and many left the property.

ing efforts. His Toro 8000 irrigation system gives him the flexibility to adjust his watering schedule according to conditions noted during his daily rounds.

No happy 'medium'

Because the golf course was built on swampy land which had to be filled in during construction, most of it lays over an eight-inch clay base, making water management even more essential.

"There's no happy medium with our soils," says Schlippert. "When it's wet, the soil is like muck, but it's like a brick when it's dry. I insisted on continuous cart paths during construction, and that takes care of a lot of the traffic pressure." □

—The author is a frequent contributor to *LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT*.