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The unrepaired golf club divot has long been a thorn in the side of the golf course superintendent.

It's a nagging, persistent problem. Like a squashed bug on a shiny clean window, or coffee spilled on a crisp white shirt.

Golfers have never been fully behind divot repair, as much as they would support, let's say, free golf or fewer sand traps.

Solutions have included bottles with seed mix attached to golf cars to boxes filled with the stuff right there on the tee. Signs don't work because the golfers don't want to be bothered. They must figure they don't come to the course to work, or that "it doesn't matter."

A new compost/seed blend has given Dan Dinelli, CGCS, superintendent at North Shore Country Club, Glenview, Ill., a new strategy for divot repair.

The new blend, from GreenCycle, Inc., Northfield, Ill., is very dark-colored. The repaired divot stands out, and makes golfers aware of the need

to do likewise when their golf clubs scar the turf.

"They could see we were out there repairing divots and that they were leaving them behind. It's changed their attitudes, and helped with our maintenance," says Dinelli.

Golfers started being more careful about gouging the turf, and more of them began to replace and patch their divots during play, says Dinelli.

The crew had long used a sand/peat topdressing in the divot mix. The repair process is the same, but the compost helps turf fill divots faster than sand-based material.

Superintendent Dinelli seeks other new ways to use the compost in turf-repair, such as to fill in after hydraulic leaks from equipment.

It's all about finding more common sense, practical ways to use compost, beyond filling in

around trees and shrubs. It's a superior divot-fill product, says the superintendent, because of nutrients and moisture. Unlike sand, says Dinelli, compost contains nutrients plants need. It holds moisture when it is needed by the roots of established plants and the delicate seedlings that burst out of the Providence bentgrass seed used at North Shore.

"With a sand-based mix," explains Dinelli, you have only about 20 percent peat, so there's not much organic material to hold moisture. That old sand probably gave very little seed germination and plant survival. The seeds need moisture, but we are under pressure to keep fairways firm and dry for the sake of playability. How much chance does a seedling have in that little sandy pocket in a dry fairway?" Dinelli asks.

"With compost, you can see that the seeds are really germinating and taking hold. A week after you make repairs, you see the underlying dark color covered by green peach fuzz. You know the seedlings are definitely growing. That means you're getting a quick recovery. You're not wasting seed, and you're getting those divots filled fast."

Does the darker compost absorb heat better than light-colored sand? Probably, says Dinelli. It helps to accelerate germination during cool weather. **LM**

Divot repair long a super's handicap



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