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Our Greens

Should We Rebuild, Regrass Or Neither?

By Dave Doherty

The subject of greens, it seems, has been the focus of the majority of my meetings over these past few months.

The question is always the same and it's one that needs to be answered after exhausting research, soul searching and honesty within the group that has been assigned the task of making the decision of: "What should we do with our greens?"

Total rebuild...till and regrass...no till & regrass, or rebuild through our in-house agronomic program?

The knowledge that we've accumulated over the past 10-plus years, *based on science*, has made it possible to produce and maintain high quality greens (in most cases) without going through a total rebuild and a million plus dollars.

If we're considering rebuilding our greens because of the desire for more or less movement in them, that's one thing, and we should consult and work with an architect. If we're considering rebuilding our greens because of weak turf, than that's a whole different story.

Regardless of why we are considering doing something with our greens, we need to first, *based on science*, find out what we have and what our options truly are. In most cases, if greens were constructed in the past 40 years using sand, met USGA specifications or [recommendations, as it is known today], and USGA approved drain systems, the odds are that a total replacement of existing material is not necessary.

Sands normally do not change. There's contamination yes, but change physically, no.

Excessive organic matter in the top three inches of a green is the number one cause of green failure. The number two cause of green failure is a lack of oxygen in the root zone. Both of these two factors need to be thoroughly checked before making a final decision.

The organic matter in the top four inches of a green needs to be identified and quantified in one inch increments along with a complete physical of at least six greens to provide the information needed to get started with an evaluation of greens.

The physical properties evaluation of each green needs to be taking in four inch increments to the gravel layer [normally three samples] from each green. The first tier sample needs to be from the surface to a four-inch depth.

The second tier sample needs to be taken from the four-inch to eight-inch depth and the third tier sample needs to be taken from the eight-inch depth to the 12-inch depth.

Hopefully at the 12-inch depth we will be into the gravel layer located just below the greens mix. The organic matter and sand size and shape need to be quantified in one-inch increments to the gravel layer.

Checking the number two cause of green failure – lack of oxygen in the root zone – is something that can be done by the maintenance staff in-house and on site.

Our two-part article (*March/April and May/June 2008, Boardroom magazine*) entitled “Bad Guy Gasses”, outlined the effects of a lack of oxygen in a root zone. Review these two articles before making a decision regarding rebuilding or regrassing greens.

By working with golf course superintendents over the last 10-plus years, we’ve been able to develop procedures that allow us to identify if greens are suffering from bad guy gasses.

Unfortunately greens are like our children and very few are alike. Greens age differently depending on many different factors and as a result it’s impossible to outline a procedure or set of procedures to identify bad guy gasses.

Let me know about your situation and I will direct you as best I can.

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