

Dealing with Divots

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(Above) This old Oaken Bucket helps repair divots.

(Right) Not too unusual for a par-3 tee.





*(Top right)
At Allegheny Country
Club, Pennsylvania,
Superintendent Bill
Schmuck shows a
tee bench.*



*(Right) Lift the lid and it
becomes a divot repair
soil box.*

WHAT TO DO about divots? This is one of those little things that every golf course superintendent must contend with but can never overcome.

Small wonder! The National Golf Foundation reports that the average seasonal daily play today on an 18-hole course is about 150 rounds. That's about 30,000 rounds of golf a year for each of the nation's 18-hole courses. That adds up to a lot of divots and a lot of repair work.

When golf was young, the teeing ground was a small area. Since there was not a great deal of play and the tees were mowed by hand, a good grass cover was

possible. But in time as the number of golfers increased, good grassy tees became more difficult and more costly to maintain. The only answer to the problem lies in larger tees and a constant divot repair program.

Next to providing a level stance for the golfer, size is the most important tee consideration. Without enough ground, grass cannot recover from heavy divoting and traffic. Luckily, it is easy to calculate how much area is needed. For par-4 and par-5 holes, 100 square feet of usable area is required for every 1,000 rounds of golf annually. For par-3 holes, 200 square feet is needed. Tees meeting these general guidelines will have a better chance of

keeping a dense cover throughout the playing season. This is an important consideration for anyone planning to rebuild old tees or designing new ones.

The use of fast growing grasses on tees with divot problems is another aid. In northern climates, some favor Penncross bentgrass while others prefer improved perennial ryegrasses. In southern areas, various bermudagrass and zoysiagrass varieties are the choice. Obviously there are growth rate differences, even among grasses of the same species. For example, the faster growing Vamont bermudagrass is preferred over the slower growing Midiron bermudagrass for tees where these varieties are adapted.

Good tees, regardless of the grass species, absolutely require very close attention to fertilization rates, irrigation needs and pesticide protection. These needs are even greater when cutting heights are lowered and grass clippings collected. Many tees have become an intensive management area.

Although there are no set rules for divot repair programs, the greatest hope of all remains with the golfer himself. If every golfer would only repair his own ball marks and replace his own divots, the nation's golf courses would be conspicuously improved and noticeably less expensive to maintain. Proper etiquette calls for this, but too few hear the call. Surely, if golfers would limit their practice swings to off-tee areas only, a tremendous leap forward could be made.

THE PRACTICE of placing topdressing containers on par-3 tees has made a small comeback in recent years after being commonplace in the 1920s and 1930s. A few clubs use the topdressing containers as tee markers

and some have also included small topdressing containers on every electric golf cart. Each container holds the divot topdressing mixture, seed and a scoop. The scoop is used to place topdressing over the scar left if the divot is destroyed.

The self-repair approach, unfortunately, receives only mixed reviews. Many golfers are apathetic. Agronomically, it doesn't take long for the seed to germinate in the mix and the helpful golfer may find a mass of vegetation in the container. One solution is to place the seed in a dispenser, like a salt shaker, to keep it dry and prevent germination. But each new step in the self-repair process only seems to complicate and discourage its use even more.

The best approach to divot repair is a regular program by the professional grounds staff. The professional staff is more proficient than most golfers in judging how much topdressing to place over an old divot hole. Usually, doing the work once or twice a week is enough if the tees are sufficiently large. Most often, one or two crew members apply the divot mixture by hand to the injured

areas. The next step is to smooth the area with a shovel and then off to the next tee. Devoting time to divot repairs pays dividends. The golfers, too, become more conscientious about repairing injured turf when they see that the professional staff is devoting time to it.

THE DIVOT MIXTURE used by the professional staff is usually one of seed, soil, and/or sand. Seed germination of cool season grasses such as bentgrass, is more difficult in sand alone. On the other hand, actively growing warm season grasses will readily spread in pure sand and rapidly cover without the need of additional seed and soil.

Good tees and a dense, uniform turf cover undeniably add to the enjoyment and attractiveness of every golf course. Good tees don't just happen. They must be of adequate size, have the proper grass, and, follow a conscientiously planned management and divot repair program. Good tees cost money. The enjoyment they bring and the impression they leave make it all worthwhile.

A good tee leaves a lasting impression.

