

The One-Man Topdressing Operation

by JOHN H. FOY

Agronomist, Southeastern Region, USGA Green Section

THERE IS NO WAY of getting around the fact that proper golf course maintenance consumes a lot of man-hours. In addition to the routine operations such as mowing, irrigation, pesticide applications, and fertilization, additional required maintenance practices such as aerification, topdressing, and verticutting must be performed periodically. Innovations in equipment continue to improve the efficiency of these operations, but it has been my experience that superintendents are always eager to further streamline and improve operating efficiency. My best turf tip of 1987 is a simple

means of reducing the labor requirement of routine topdressing operations.

This turf tip was observed at the Banyan Golf Club, in West Palm Beach, Florida, where Dan Jones is the golf course superintendent. Besides providing the membership with one of the consistently best maintained golf courses in the area, Dan is the editor of the award-winning *Florida Green* magazine, and donates hours of his time to community service projects. Obviously, good organization and efficient use of his time are necessary. These traits can be observed throughout the maintenance programs at Banyan. An excellent

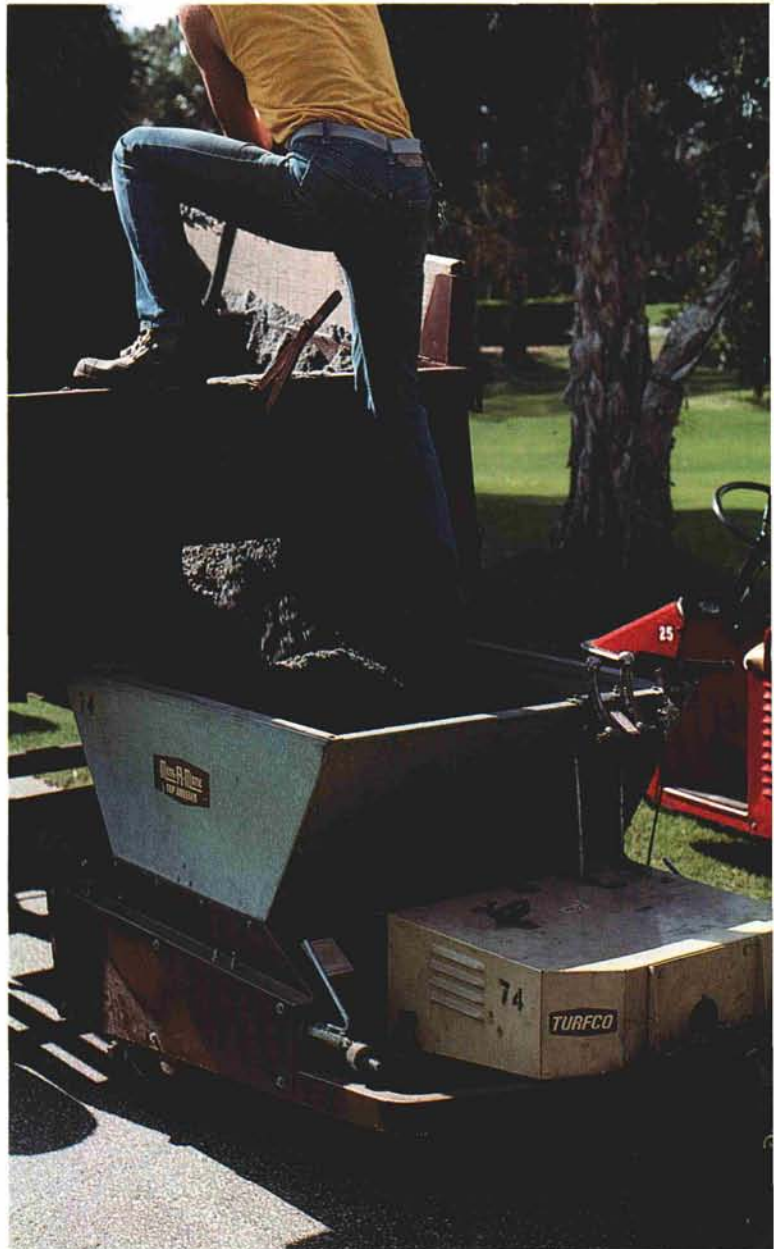
example of this is the one-man topdressing operation.

Typically, when topdressing is underway, two or even three men are involved, and, unfortunately, valuable man-hours are lost while the crew has to wait for various phases of the operation to be completed. At Banyan, only one man is required for topdressing, thus more efficient use of valuable man-hours is realized.

When Jones arrived at Banyan several years ago, he discovered an old three-cubic-yard trailer sitting among a number of other pieces of scrap equipment.

The setup: tractor, trailer, and topdresser at Banyan Golf Club, Florida.





(Top) Outfitted with a hydraulic lift.

(Above) Hydraulic lift control at rear of trailer.

A one-man "fill-up."

After restoring the trailer and making a few modifications, he developed the one-man topdressing operation. The basic modifications consisted of installing a hydraulic lift to the front of the trailer and an electrical control setup at the back to monitor filling the topdresser, and a three-way tailgate. The three-way tailgate improves the versatility of the trailer so that it can be used for other hauling operations. A couple of 12-volt batteries are mounted on the trailer to power the electrical control system of the hydraulic lift, but it should

be noted that the batteries are also connected into the charging system of the tractor that is used for towing the trailer in order to maintain a constant charge.

The really innovative part of this operation is the ability to tow the topdressing machine to where it is to be used. The mechanic at Banyan fabricated a very simple hitch setup from a piece of steel pipe. The hitch connects to the back frame of the trailer and the front frame of the topdressing unit. Cotter

pins secure the hitch, but at the same time afford a quick and simple disconnect.

Examination of this setup reveals that it is simple, yet extremely functional. Once the trailer is filled with topdressing material, one operator can conduct a topdressing operation. Jones reports that when a light application of topdressing is being made to the greens, one trailer load is enough for nine greens. Over a year's time, this very efficient operation saves a significant amount of man-hours.