

## Artificial Surfaces for the Golf Course

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MOST GOLF COURSE turfgrasses suffer in very high traffic areas. In many cases, artificial surfaces such as asphalt or concrete are used. Unfortunately, when a golf shot strikes these hard surfaces, the golfer is either too severely penalized or rewarded. Ideally, a low-maintenance, playable surface resistant to wear would better suit the golfer.

Synthetic turf has historically been used as coverings for football, soccer, baseball, or tennis, but it may also have potential for golf course cart paths and practice tees.

One type of artificial surface is synthetic turf topdressed with sand. Synthetic turf has been tried recently on golf cart paths and practice tees on several courses in the Southeast. For a long-lasting effect, Dick Schulz, of the Atlanta Country Club, in Atlanta, Georgia, suggests proper installation is the key. Ideally, tee and path surfaces should be smooth without bumps or rolls. For golf cart paths, the synthetic turf can be placed over an existing asphalt or concrete path, or on a gravel drainage base. The terrain may be level or undulating, but the sub-base must be compacted with a roller so the finished surface is smooth. Any defects in the sub-base are magnified on the finished cart path surface.

Golf cart paths are usually eight feet wide, and the artificial materials are packaged in 15-foot rolls. To be affordable, the rolls are cut to seven-and-a-half-foot length, allowing a three-inch border on each side for an eight-foot-wide cart path.

The next step in installation is the application of construction or topdressing sand. The sand must be dry so it will penetrate between the synthetic fibers. The sand's weight actually anchors the carpet. Fill the surface with sand, allowing only 1/16 inch to 1/8 inch of fiber above the sand layer. A second topdressing in four to six weeks compensates for settling the original application.

Most golf courses in the South allow bermudagrass to grow to the edges of



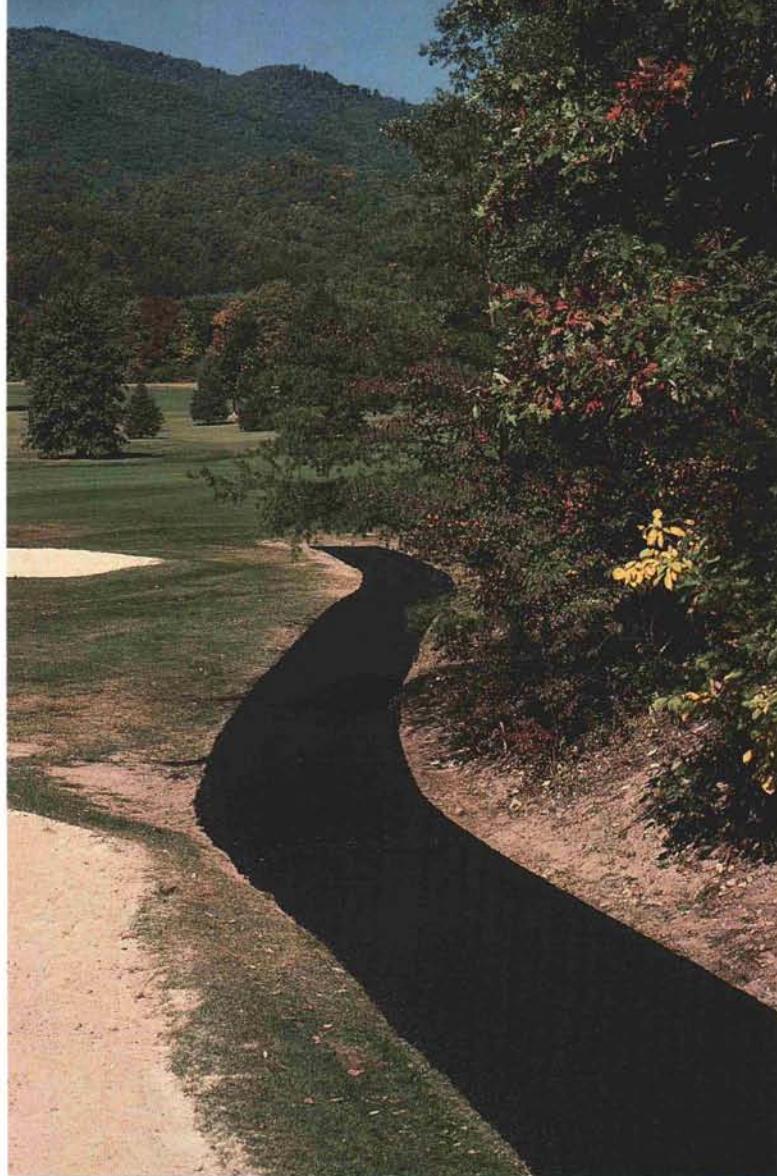
*Artificial carpet on the practice range.*

the artificial surface and finish off by laying sod or by seeding. The new synthetic cart path is more aesthetic than black asphalt, and being softer, it allows the path to be located closer to areas of play. Since golf balls don't bounce as far after striking this material, the golfer is less likely to be penalized. Golf carts have good traction with artificial surfaces. If the golfer chooses, golf shots can be played from the artificial surface, too.

For maintenance, brooming or dragging weekly keeps the fibers erect. Light topdressing periodically keeps the surface looking good, too. One warning is to stay away from these surfaces with any leaf-blowing machines. The intense air pressure can destabilize the artificial surface.

The practice tee is another possible area for the carpets. Iron or wooden clubs will not scratch the material, and golfers find it a nice, tight surface for practice shots. Several clubs provide an eight-foot-wide strip on the practice tee for the winter and for rainy days. Golf courses with small practice ranges or with the policy of unlimited free range balls may also benefit from this material. The superintendent will be able to reduce overseeding, mowing, fertilizing, watering, and divot repair. The surface is easily installed by removing the practice tee grasses and laying the material on a final sub-base.

In an effort to attain natural-looking, minimal-maintenance conditions on certain areas of a golf course, this type of artificial surface may be worth consideration.



(Left) Blacktop path.

(Below) A smooth sub-base is important.

(Bottom) Carpeted path.

