TURF TWISTERS

OPENING TOO EARLY

Question: We are in the early planning stages of building a new golf course and are debating seeding rates for the greens. Do higher seeding rates result in quicker establishment and an earlier opening date? (New York)

Answer: Recent research at Cornell University compared various seeding rates (.5, 1, 2, 4 lb. per 1,000 sq. ft.) for establishing creeping bentgrass and found that establishment was not hastened by increasing seeding rates above the recommended 1 lb. per 1,000 sq. ft. rate. The higher seeding rates did provide more rapid cover initially, but cover differences between the 1 lb. rate and higher seeding rates were no longer evident six weeks after establishment. The 2 lb. and 4 lb. seeding rates resulted in more individual plants that had fewer tillers, more shallow and less fibrous root systems and higher disease incidence. The weaker, shallow-rooted plants are more likely to suffer from traffic injury once the greens are open to play. A seeding rate of 1 lb. per 1,000 sq. ft. is most effective and will not prolong establishment.

BY GOLFER DEMANDS

Question: What are the suggested heights of cut for hybrid bermudagrass fairways and roughs? The low-handicap golfers are always demanding closely cut fairways and at least 2-inch-high roughs like they see on TV. Yet the vast majority of our golfers have average to high handicaps, and they feel that this is a very penal course setup. (Florida)

Answer: First, for daily play, it is always best to try to maintain a course setup that accommodates the majority of the golfers. When it comes to bermudagrass fairways and roughs, during periods of active growth heights of cut of ½ inch and 1¼ to 1½ inches, respectively, would be suggested. Then, in the fall, as the growth rate of the bermuda begins to slow down, raising the height of cut to ⅝ to ¾ inch for the fairways and 1¾ inches for the rough areas is a standard practice at most courses. This slightly higher height of cut helps to increase the turf's wear tolerance and maintain a degree of definition between the fairway and rough cuts. These suggested heights of cut are not excessively penal for average- to high-handicap golfers.

RESULTS IN TRAUMA

Question: During the months of July and August I feel that it would be beneficial to aerify the putting greens, but I'm afraid to do so because of the physical trauma. Is there an alternative piece of equipment that can be used safely during the summer months to restore water movement through the soil profile? (Kansas)

Answer: One of the most popular methods of restoring water movement through the soil profile underneath putting greens during the summer months is to use a water injection aerifier. These aerifiers greatly reduce the physical trauma caused by aerification because they do not rely on the insertion of a tine that pulls the turf upward upon removal. For best results, water injection aerifiers are used in the "raised" position. The purpose of operating the aerifier in this mode is to produce a ¼-inch diameter passageway through the thatch layer that allows water and oxygen to move easily into the soil below. Since creating holes in the surface of a putting green can also allow soil moisture to escape quickly, water injection aerification should be performed in the early morning and the turf should be carefully monitored for drought symptoms for several days.