

Turf Groomers: Good for the Grass, Good for the Game

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GOLF COURSE superintendents face a very real dilemma with putting green speed. At one end, better golfers often demand fast greens; at the other extreme, the not-so-proficient golfers prefer "greens with some grass on them." To these high-handicap golfers, greens that hold are much more important than greens that are fast.

Complicating the decision are the agronomics of putting green management. While closely cut greens generally putt faster (since there is less grass on them), they are also more difficult to maintain during periods of stressful weather. On the other hand, higher cutting heights help grass survive these periods of stress, but they have a negative effect on putting green speed. Thus, the golf course superintendent faces a problem. Should he go for very fast greens and risk the health of the turf, or play it safe with the turf and risk incurring the wrath of the better golfers?

Fortunately, my Turf Tip offers a mutually beneficial compromise. The new grooming attachments for today's putting green mowers allow the golf course superintendent to maintain a reasonable cutting height that is good for the turf, yet allows green speeds to be kept in the range that golfers prefer. This is one piece of equipment that has lived up to its advanced billing.

Essentially, groomers act as mini-verticutters. They remove a small yet significant amount of excess leaf tissue, thereby reducing the leafiness, stemminess, and grain so common on most grasses used for putting greens today. Greens cut with a groomer program generally roll smoother, truer, and faster than greens cut without it. Although it sounds almost too good to be true, I found it to be so.

As with any tool, groomers must not be overused. Care should be taken to monitor their daily use on the clean-up lap around greens and during periods of extreme stress. Their use should be re-

duced or deferred during periods of extreme heat, humidity, and drought stress, or when common sense suggests they are no longer needed.

These attachments are not panaceas, nor are they designed to compensate for poor putting green management practices. They are a useful tool for today's golf course superintendent who must balance doing what's best for the grass and what's best for the game.

(Below) Bill Milsop, superintendent at the Old York Road Country Club in Spring House, Pennsylvania, is smiling because he now has groomers to better manage his grass and putting green speeds.

(Bottom left) Groomers are available for several types of greensmowers.

(Bottom right) Are we cutting our greens too close? The better color occurs in the slightly depressed turf in a wheel mark . . . a sure sign of mowing the grass too short.

