



The long shadows of late afternoon gradually give way to a long night of fairway aerification at Coldstream Country Club in Cincinnati, Ohio.

FAIRWAY AERIFICATION AROUND THE CLOCK

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AERIFICATION continues to be one of the most important ingredients in a golf course maintenance program. Despite this agronomic fact, most golfers despise the inconvenience that aerification brings. Everyone would agree that the ultimate combination would be to get the aerification work done at the proper time while avoiding golfer inconvenience. At Coldstream Country Club in Cincinnati, Ohio, we have come up with a fairway aerification program that is helping us both get the work done and minimize disruption/inconvenience to golfers.

Our fairway aerification program begins late Sunday afternoon and continues through Sunday night and all day Monday, a day when the club is normally closed. This approach allows us to complete fairway aerification in approximately 28 hours. Previously, before we worked around the clock, it would take 40 or more hours to complete all the fairways. Our present strategy has shortened the fairway aerification process, helped save time and money, and noticeably reduced golfer inconvenience.

Advance preparation and planning are very important to the success of our program.

Calendar dates must be decided upon and coordinated with our course officials. Residents living around the golf course need to be contacted and informed about our plans. Work-shift scheduling for our staff must be determined carefully. The equipment needed has to be made ready and double-checked. It is also very important to mark fairway sprinkler heads before starting.

The actual date for the fairway aerification work to be done is first discussed with the green committee and then, per committee recommendation, is sent for approval by the board of directors. We try to aerify as early

in the fall as possible. This ensures the best possible agronomic value for our efforts. With early, advanced scheduling, there are no surprises for those participating in golfing events planned just before or after the work. In fact, the best approach is to get the aerification work scheduled before golfing activities are actually placed on the club's calendar.

We inform all of our neighbors of the aerification time and date, so no one panics when they see lights out on the golf course at night. In addition to the obvious practical benefits, this has also improved community relations with the club. Our neighbors have appreciated knowing what is going on in our maintenance program, especially when it directly affects them.

It is important to schedule work shifts well in advance of the actual aerification. An employee must be willing to work at night, and must have a proven track record (familiar with the equipment and the golf course, and be dependable) to go with his/her willingness. Since we do not add additional staff for this work, balancing the night shift with Monday staffing is important. Some of those working a shift during the night will need to come back on Monday to assist with core processing and cleanup.

All equipment needed for fairway aerification is checked and adjusted ahead of time to minimize the potential for breakdown. Lights mounted on our utility vehicle, used to pull the GA-60 aerifier, are checked and adjusted. The four floodlights, along with the headlights on the truckster, create good visibility 30 degrees around the unit. Aerification tines are installed, set to a depth of four inches, and tightened. All fluid levels are

carefully checked. In addition, our two-way radio communication system is double-checked.

On Sunday afternoon, before we actually start punching holes, all fairways to be aerified during the night are mowed, and sprinkler heads and valve boxes are marked with small flags. Indicator flags work much better for night visibility than simply using paint. After sprinkler heads are marked, the aerification can begin.

Aerification is started at around 5:00 p.m. on Sunday, following the final group of golfers. Although neighbors are notified in advance, we try to aerify those fairways closest to homes early in the evening to minimize noise disturbance. Employees work a six-hour shift, starting with the advance mowing of fairways. This allows those working Sunday afternoon and early evening to get some sleep before returning on Monday.

We are fortunate at Coldstream that my assistant lives on the property. Through two-way radio communication, he is available to the GA-60 aerifier operator should a problem occur. This adds an element of security and safety to the operation.

Fluid levels are rechecked after each six-hour shift as aerification continues through the night. Normally, 10 or 11 fairways are aerified by early Monday morning. Fairways not mowed Sunday afternoon, prior to aerification, are completed first thing on Monday morning. In addition, core processing is started early Monday morning on fairways that were aerified during the night.

We use two core-destroyers to process the aerification plugs. Fairways are then dragged with a metal dragmat to work the soil into

the turf. The debris is blown to the center of the fairway with a blower mounted on a truckster and then picked up with a leaf sweeper.

Holes are aerified in numerical order of play. By Monday evening the only work remaining is the cleanup on holes 16, 17, and 18. This is easily completed on Tuesday morning before the first group of the day reaches these holes.

There are a number of clear advantages to fairway aerification around the clock, as compared with the traditional daytime approach.

Golfer Convenience

First of all, golfers are not faced with playing on aerified fairways. They do not get mud/soil on their shoes, and the routing of golf carts is not a factor. Since the primary purpose of the golf course is player enjoyment, we feel this first advantage is a major one.

Agronomic Benefit

With the inconvenience to golfers virtually eliminated, we can schedule fairway aerification earlier in the fall. Early fall (just after Labor Day) aerification produces an excellent environment for grass growth throughout the fall season, as compared with what occurs when pushing the work to a later date in the season (often done in an effort to reduce golfer inconvenience). The turf also will recover from aerification more quickly in early fall as compared with later. Smaller staff size and shorter days also make late fall aerification less than ideal.

Dry weather conditions allow aerification and core processing to be done more easily with better results. Aerification around the clock reduces the chances of delays due to bad weather.

Time Saving

Time saving is another significant advantage. My staff does not have to wait on golfers with this approach, and as a result the work gets done much more quickly. We save at least 12 hours as compared to doing the work during the daylight hours, spread over a four- to seven-day period. In addition, with proper staff scheduling there is no time spent waiting for the aerifier to finish before the core processing and cleanup can be done. Everyone stays busy.

Conclusion

Like most golf course superintendents, I never looked forward to aerification. However, this approach has allowed us to do both what is right for the turf and keep the course as enjoyable as possible for our membership. The end result has been better turf, less disruption to play, and happier members and staff. Not a bad combination.

Fairway aerification begins Sunday evening just after 5:00 p.m. Floodlights provide the needed visibility for night aerification.

