A Float Above The Rest

Two simple and inexpensive ideas to improve mowing and irrigation programs at your golf course.

by JIM SKORULSKI

IT SEEMS THAT sand bunker restoration has become a popular practice at golf courses throughout the country. An often-seen trend with restoration work involves sodding banks that once were flashed with sand. The renovated banks typically are maintained with supplemental irrigation systems and fertilized to provide a manicured appearance and active turf growth throughout the season. The new banks often are steep, forcing mowing operations to be completed manually with rotary mowers, Flymo machines, or string trimmers, depending on the bank's severity.

A Flymo is modified with ⅝-inch vinyl tubing to elevate the machine for a greater height of cut.

Flymo machines are a popular choice for steeper banks and mounding due to their light weight and the quality of cut. However, mowing heights with the Flymo machines are fixed by the depth of the machine's deck and the air pressure developed by the motor. Often this mowing height is slightly below desired mowing heights for Kentucky bluegrass, tall fescue, and fine fescue turf growing on the steep banks.

Kip Tyler, CGCS at the Salem Country Club in Peabody, Massachusetts, has found a way to raise the height of cut on the Flymo machines that he uses to maintain the steeper sand bunker banks and mounding. He accomplishes this by retrofitting the machines with a piece of flexible vinyl tubing. The tubing is fastened to the bottom of the machine's deck using eight machine screws. The screws are inserted upward through the tubing and plastic mowing deck, and secured along the top of the deck using flat washers and nylon lock nuts.

This simple modification has proven effective for several years at the Salem Country Club for Tyler and his staff. The vinyl tubing used has ranged from ⅝- to ¾-inch outside diameter for the smaller 3-horsepower machines, and up to 1-inch diameter for the larger 5-horsepower machines. Tyler has found that the ¾-inch-diameter tubing seems to provide the ideal mowing height for his conditions. Expect the tubing to show wear midway through the season if the machines are heavily used. However, replacing the tubing requires little time and minimal cost.

This easy and inexpensive modification may make the Flymo machines a more effective and versatile option for maintaining the steep banks and mounding on the golf course, and ease the maintenance of newly grassed bunker faces. Give it a try!

A second tip is courtesy of Peter Salinetti, CGCS, General Manager at the Schuyler Meadows Club in Loudonville, New York. Schuyler Meadows Club also has the honorable distinction of being the first fully certified golf course in New York State in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program. Salinetti experienced ongoing problems with aquatic weeds and algae entering the irrigation system. The organic material would cause valves to stick and eventually block sprinklerhead nozzles.

The solution was simple and inexpensive, and was accomplished by pumping air through a ¾-inch garden hose that is submerged adjacent to the intake screens on the wet well. A small 1-horsepower electric air compressor operated out of the pump house is used to pump the air and create bubbles. The end of the hose is staked near the intake screen where the air keeps the organic material away from the wet well. The small compressor is usually operated 24 hours per day during the summer season, when the organic matter and the system's use are at their highest. Salinetti has found that the electricity requirements for the small motor are minimal, making the operation costs pennies per day.

This simple solution has resulted in uninterrupted use of the irrigation system, and has saved considerable labor that would be required to clean the intake screens and clogged irrigation components. It also has eliminated the need, at least thus far, to treat the irrigation pond with aquatic herbicides and algicides.

The small compressor has also proven its worth to Salinetti and the Schuyler Meadows Club in the past, as it was used as the primary tool for remediation work on a contaminated aquifer. The compressor was used successfully to pump air into the aquifer and stimulate the microbial breakdown and vaporization of petroleum compounds. The contamination was reduced from 15,000 ppb to 0 ppb in an 18-month period. Not bad for pennies a day.

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