

ERGONOMIC TEE DIVOT FILLING

Visible, convenient divot filling bottles equate to more usage.

by **BOB BRAME**

GOLFERS and turf managers alike recognize the value of quick divot damage recovery on tee surfaces. Smooth, uniform tees mean good playability to the golfer. Quick divot recovery to the turf manager means healthy, dense turf that improves the odds of coming through tough weather and/or heavy player traffic with a decent stand of grass. A key component in maintaining healthy, dense tee surfaces is divot filling. In a few cases, this work is done entirely by the maintenance staff. However, many courses encourage players to join the staff in working to fill tee divots.

Placing a mixture of topdressing and seed into divots immediately after they are made obviously will result in quicker turf recovery than what could be expected with weekly or even daily divot filling. This is the potential value of providing players with the resources needed to fill their tee divots immediately. Tom Zimmerman, golf course

superintendent at the Elcona Country Club in Elkhart, Indiana, has developed a tee divot filling system that makes it easy for players to join the maintenance effort.

Tom has expanded the use of plastic divot filling bottles to a higher level. Long-neck plastic divot filling bottles and holders (readily available on the market) are purchased and then mounted on a uniquely designed elevated stand. These ergonomic stands are constructed with half-inch steel rod. Each stand requires two 24-inch and two 10-inch sections of steel rod. To secure the plastic bottle holders, a metal plate/disc (2- or 3-inch diameter) is welded on the top of the 24-inch rods. This makes it possible to fasten the bottle holders with bolts. The top cross support (10-inch rod) is welded perpendicular to the long rods, an inch or two below the bottle holders (see photo). The lower cross support is welded about 6 inches up from the

bottom. The time and material needed to make the ergonomic holders has been minimal.

The stands can be pushed into the soil with the lower cross support and just as easily pulled out, for relocation, with the top cross support bar. This makes it easy to locate the stand with divot mix bottles next to the tee markers, where they will be needed. Since players can easily pick up a bottle with one hand, without bending over, they are used regularly. This system eliminates having to lay down a club, open a lid, or the potential for getting a glove wet. Tom reports a significant increase (triple) in players filling divots with the new ergonomic stands as compared to the previously used boxes located just off the tee surface. With increased usage comes healthier, more wear-tolerant turf.

At Elcona Country Club, the staff member assigned to move holes each day also services the tees. Markers are moved, the long-neck bottles are filled, and the ergonomic stands are strategically located next to the markers. The side opening on the long-neck bottles has prevented moisture contamination from being a problem. Should moisture get down in a bottle overnight (e.g., from sprinklers), adding fresh material the next morning eliminates the problem and insures good flow of mix out of the bottle. Tom is using an 80(sand)/20(peat moss) mixture with bentgrass seed. A 60(sand)/20(peat moss)/20(soil) mixture would also be a good possibility if the material is kept dry. Two completely full bottles at each tee have provided enough mix for one day's divot filling. Presently, the ergonomic tee divot filling stands are being used on par 3s at Elcona. However, due to player popularity, Tom is considering expanding the divot filling stations to include par 4s.

How is your tee divot filling program working? Give Tom's ergonomic approach some thought.

The long-neck plastic divot filling bottles make it easy to smooth over player damage. The uniquely designed, elevated stand allows the bottles, containing topdressing and seed, to be located close to the area where they will be used.



BOB BRAME is director of the USGA Green Section's North-Central Region.