

HAND WATERING GREENS

There is a correct way.

by PAT GROSS



Hand watering greens may seem easy, but improper technique may actually cause more harm than good.

SUMMER IS HERE, and there is nothing an overheated maintenance staff member would rather do than hand water greens on a hot afternoon. After all, it's an easy job — grab a hose, hook it up to a quick coupler, and soak the grass. Right? Think again. That employee may be doing more harm than good if he or she is not familiar with the proper way to hand water greens.

A 1992 survey of the Green Section staff indicated that over-irrigation of greens was one of the top 10 maintenance pitfalls. Over-watering contributes to disease development and inconsistent playing conditions. Even the best-designed irrigation system cannot produce a green with perfectly uniform moisture content throughout. Occasional hand watering is necessary, therefore, to compensate for localized dry spots or to cool the turfgrass canopy, and to maintain consistent playing conditions.

A couple of basic tools are necessary to do the job right — a soil probe and a hose-end nozzle that applies water in a gentle showering fashion. If regular soil probes cannot be purchased, effective probes can be made by cutting down a broken golf club shaft and cutting out a view port using a bench grinder. Staff members should be trained to check the greens with the soil probe to determine soil moisture

levels before applying any water. Many disease and insect problems display symptoms similar to localized dry spots. Watering these areas will often make the situation worse. If the turf is wilting and adequate moisture is present, staff members should report this condition to the superintendent immediately.

Hand watering the wrong way can do as much damage to the playing surface as no watering at all. Puddles on the surface of the green can promote the development of pythium or a condition known as "wet wilt." If the soil is dry, water should be applied gradually, in a showering manner, so that puddling or runoff is avoided. The goal should be to match the water application rate with the infiltration rate of the soil. It may take several minutes and several light applications of water to wet the soil. For hydrophobic areas, spiking the area first can improve water penetration. Spot applications of wetting agents also have been successful in treating localized dry spots; however, don't overuse these products to compensate for excessive thatch accumulation, compaction, or poor irrigation system coverage. In many cases, an aerifier will do a better job than a barrel of wetting agent.

Putting surfaces may wilt during the summer due to high temperatures,

high winds, and hours of intense sunlight. In these cases, syringing the greens with a light application of water can help revive the plant. The idea is to reduce the moisture stress of the leaf tissue and allow the plant to continue a balanced transpiration rate. Syringing is a very misunderstood operation. It is important to remember that you are only trying to sustain the grass plant with a very light application of water, not wet the soil.

Hand watering greens should not be forgotten on weekends. A superintendent's worst nightmare is to return from a well-deserved weekend off only to find the greens scorched due to lack of water. (Actually, this is only one of several nightmares that superintendents have!) It is a good idea to schedule one or two people to come in on Saturday and Sunday afternoon to check the greens and hand water as necessary.

As a final note, check into the reason for the localized dry spots. These areas could be the result of poor sprinkler head coverage, worn nozzles, tree root encroachment, compaction, or excessive thatch accumulation. Be sure to treat the cause and not just the symptoms.

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