

SEW IT SEAMS

Old parts can become useful tools for sodding putting greens.

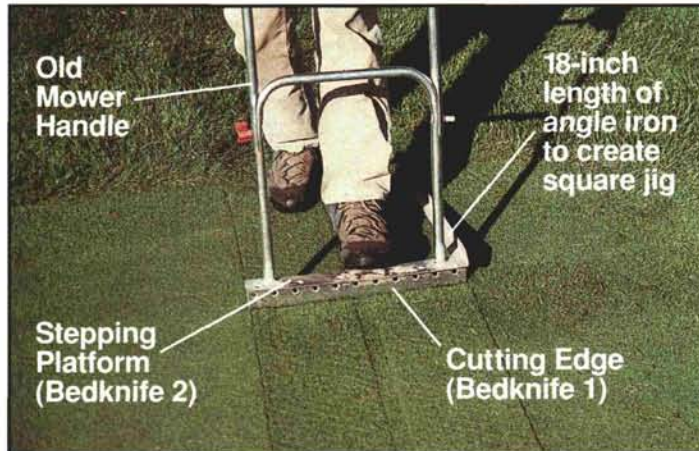
by MATT NELSON

THE NEED to use sod for putting green repairs or establishment eventually arises at most golf courses. As with most aspects of turfgrass management, sod work on putting greens demands precision, attention to detail, and good technique. In fact, work done on putting greens is often the most noticeable work conducted on the golf course, and justifiably so. Fifty percent of the game occurs on less than two percent of the entire golf course acreage—the putting green. With today's cutting heights and player demands for putting surface quality, there is no margin for error when it comes to installing putting green sod.

Whether establishing a new green, recapturing lost portions of shrunken greens, or repairing damage from environmental influences, mechanical accidents, or vandals, job quality is critical when using sod. Job quality will directly influence the rate of establishment, mowing quality, ball roll, and, ultimately, the time it takes for the sodded area to attain maximum playing quality. This is just what Dick Collins, superintendent of Whitefish Lake Golf Club in Whitefish, Montana, and his crew realized while working with putting green sod during a construction project in 1992.

The golf course was being converted from a 27-hole to a 36-hole facility, and two existing greens were reconstructed to accommodate the rerouting and design changes. These two greens were sodded to return the existing nine holes to play quickly. Putting green sod for the project came from the two greens to be reconstructed and from an established putting green nursery. Layering was not of much concern since the root zones were very similar.

Upon starting the project, the crew realized that the best fit and highest quality were attained when individual sod pieces were laid in precisely the order in which they were cut. With a project of this magnitude, though, logistics proved difficult. After some discussion, the crew concluded that if they had some sort of tool or jig that



Two bedknives, an 18-inch length of one-inch angle iron, and an old lawnmower handle were used to create this tool which cuts perfectly square pieces of sod. The 18-inch square pieces are easy to handle and fit well together.

could cut perfectly square pieces of sod, the order of sod replacement would not matter and they would attain a perfect fit with every piece. Since the sod cutter produced 18-inch-wide strips, a tool that could cut perfectly square 18-inch lengths would be best. Square pieces can be laid in any orientation and fit very well together. Eighteen-inch square pieces are also easy to handle. Large pieces that require rolling can more easily fall apart or become stretched, and they may require timely modifications.

When crew members expressed their desire for such a tool to golf course mechanic Curt Ost, two discarded 18-inch bedknives, an old lawnmower handle, and a piece of 1-inch angle iron were combined to make the idea a reality. The bedknives were welded together perpendicularly, with one knife serving as the cutting edge, and the second serving as a stepping platform to drive the cutting edge through the turf. An 18-inch length of 1-inch angle iron was welded at a right angle to the left edge of the bedknife cutting complex. This created an 18" × 18" square. Lastly, the lawnmower handle was attached for ease of use.

Once this tool was taken to the field, job quality and efficiency improved dramatically. Pieces were uniformly installed and the seams were tight. Not only were perfectly square pieces of sod harvested, but the tool proved to be very easy to use and gentle on the operator's back, too! The angle iron

side aligns the tool with the sod cutter line, and the tip to the previous cut. One person can quickly cut hundreds of square pieces of sod.

This tool also can reduce waste when making repairs to putting greens using sod. An article written by the USGA Green Section's Mid-Continent Director, Paul Vermeulen, describes squaring-off the targeted area to facilitate ease and quality of repairs (*Green Section Record*, May/June 1996). By squaring-off the selected area, it is conceivable that an exact amount of sod can be transplanted by using this tool and measuring lengths divisible by 18 inches.

Whether repairing small damaged areas, or establishing an entire putting surface, quality installation is the key to success when using sod. In-house sodding projects will require a putting green nursery (which should be identical to the existing greens in grass composition and root zone), time (this should not be a rush job!), and good technique. This Turf Tip emphasizes the benefits of crew continuity and stresses the importance of an innovative mechanic and recycling. The next time you are poking around in your shop, remember, there just might be a use for those old bedknives and mower parts, *or sew it seams!*

MATT NELSON "seams" perfect to attend to the needs of golf courses in the Northeastern Region as agronomist for the USGA Green Section.