

# MULCH-A-MATIC

*A rotary mower blade that turns a standard deck into a mulching deck.*

by PAUL VERMEULEN

ALL OVER THE COUNTRY, golf course superintendents are either trading in or retiring their trusty (rusty?) rough gang mowers for multi-deck rotary mowers. The disenchantment with gang mowers is easy to appreciate and is due to a combination of factors, including:

- Bogging down in wet conditions.
- Clutter, such as small tree branches, clogging the reels.
- High cost of maintenance (reel grinding, bearing replacement, and overhauling of gearboxes).
- Inability to mow areas covered with leaves.
- Poor maneuverability in heavily wooded areas and on steep slopes.

While rotary mowers have become the new undisputed kings of the rough, their standard decks could use some improvement. One common problem associated with standard decks is that they can leave the playing surface covered with clumps of grass and leaves.

To address this problem, manufacturers are attempting to develop mulching decks with sealed openings that recut large clippings and other debris until they are small enough to fall into the turf canopy. By sealing the opening, however, mulching decks tend to struggle and often bog down with unmulched clippings when the turf is dewy or wet. Ideally, superintendents want the clean cut of a mulching deck and the ease of mowing of a standard deck during wet conditions.

To reap the advantages of both the standard and mulching decks, Ron Briminger, golf course mechanic at Norwood Hills Country Club in St. Louis, Missouri, developed an ideal hybrid — a standard deck with his own revolutionary mulching blade. The genius of Ron's blade is the four louvers on the opposite side of the cutting edge. These louvers redirect a high percentage of the air flow towards the center of a standard deck so that large clippings and other debris are re-cut over and over. The result is roughly

a 30% to 50% reduction in the amount of grass clippings and leaves left on the playing surface.

To make the blades available to the turf industry, Ron sold his blade design to Frederick Manufacturing Corp. in Kansas City, Missouri. They in turn sell the blades nationwide under the name Gator Mulcher™ through Silver Streak Distributors. The blades are made to fit a long list of commercial mowers, including top brands such as Bunton, Dixie Chopper, Honda, Jacobsen, John Deere, Lesco, Toro, and Walker. The

blades also are made in universal sizes of 19", 20", 21", and 22".

Gator Mulcher™ blades offer an easy way to retrofit existing rotaries so that they have the advantages of a mulching mower and the power of a standard mower in wet conditions. The retrofit takes just a few minutes with a handy air wrench and can be made with a minimal investment.

PAUL VERMEULEN is director of the USGA Green Section Mid-Continent Region.

*To enhance clipping recycling underneath standard rotary decks, superintendents can equip them with mulching blades.*

*A blade that has become popular for this purpose is the Gator Mulcher™. Its revolutionary design creates an air flow towards the center of the deck through a series of four louvers.*



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