

TURF TWISTERS

QUALITY PUTTING

Question: Our golf course superintendent does an excellent job of providing quality putting surfaces that require a well-struck shot to hold. The problem is that when the shot hits in front of the green it seldom releases onto the putting surfaces. This is especially troublesome on a windy day when a bump-and-run shot is required. Any suggestions to reduce this problem? (Oregon)

Answer: Believe it or not, this is one of the most consistent problems viewed at golf courses from low to high budgets. The answers are many; however, it is a simple problem to solve. In a nutshell, treat the 10- to 15-yard area in front of the greens as a green! Do the following and your problem will go away:

- Water carefully and use wetting agents, if necessary.
- Aerify with large tines two or three times per year and backfill the holes with a good-quality sand.
- Lightly topdress every two or three weeks, just like the greens.
- Fertilize carefully to avoid excess organic near the surface.
- Make sure the subsurface drainage is working properly.

REQUIRES SKILL AND

Question: We are finding that as turf maintenance equipment becomes more complex, and often as expensive as luxury automobiles, there is a need to employ more skilled individuals as repair technicians. Our problem is, where do we find and how do we retain these qualified people? (California)

Answer: Unfortunately, there are only a few specialized programs scattered about the country that train turf equipment technicians. These individuals are in such demand that often they have positions waiting for them upon graduation. A next-best solution may be to contact a local trade school and hire people trained in automotive, truck, or heavy equipment repair and then send them to a local equipment distributor to learn about reel maintenance. Once good technicians are found, providing them with a well-equipped, modern workshop, compensating them fairly, and treating them with respect should help to retain them.

TOOLS

Question: It seems that I have been hearing more about GPS mapping and GIS software lately. Exactly how can the new satellite and computer technology aid our maintenance program? (New York)

Answer: The GPS and aerial imagery are both powerful tools for mapping work on golf courses. The Global Positioning System (GPS) uses a network of satellites for mapping purposes. The Geographical Information System (GIS) is software that can combine the mapping data (derived from imaging or GPS) with a database, allowing the user to access and link information either through the maps or database. The maps or images produced from imaging or GPS technology are invaluable as communication, measurement, and inventory tools, and as "as built" maps for drainage, irrigation, communication, and electrical lines. GIS technology is already incorporated to some degree in many irrigation software packages and will probably become instrumental in future pesticide and fertilizer management programs.