

Practicing Integrated Pest Management (IPM) involves using all available information to make responsible decisions concerning turf management options. A holistic turf-grass management program provides the opportunity to control as many management variables as possible. For example, fairway preparation involves much more than just mowing grass. Timely aeration, strategically implemented fertilization programs and judicious water management are major core components of an IPM program that allows fairway turf to be presented in the desired manner.

The benefits of dew and clipping dispersal go far beyond just keeping golfers' shoes dry and clean. Many of the diseases battled on golf course turf in general and fairway turf in particular are perpetuated by excess moisture. Free moisture on fairway turf is a critical factor in the development of foliar blighting diseases. The longer the leaf blades remain wet, the greater the potential for high levels of disease incidence. As such, anything that can be done to dry the turf sooner is beneficial. Turfgrass pathologists agree that if free moisture is reduced, disease incidence will be lowered, which in turn may reduce the reliance upon chemical control strategies.

With this information in mind, John Shaw, CGCS, at Rolling Hills Country Club in McMurray, Pa., developed a method to remove dew accumulation and has integrated it into existing practices and labor resources. Using materials such as PVC pipe, nylon rope, 1" irrigation hose, various nuts/bolts, and duct tape, a prototype fairway drag was developed. The drag had to be light, easy to use, flexible, maneuverable, and, most important, effective. With modifications, John devised a drag that was functional and offered a high level of efficiency.

It takes 1.5 hours to drag 24 acres of fairway turf at Rolling Hills C.C., and the process is performed 5 to 7 days a week. The speed with which the

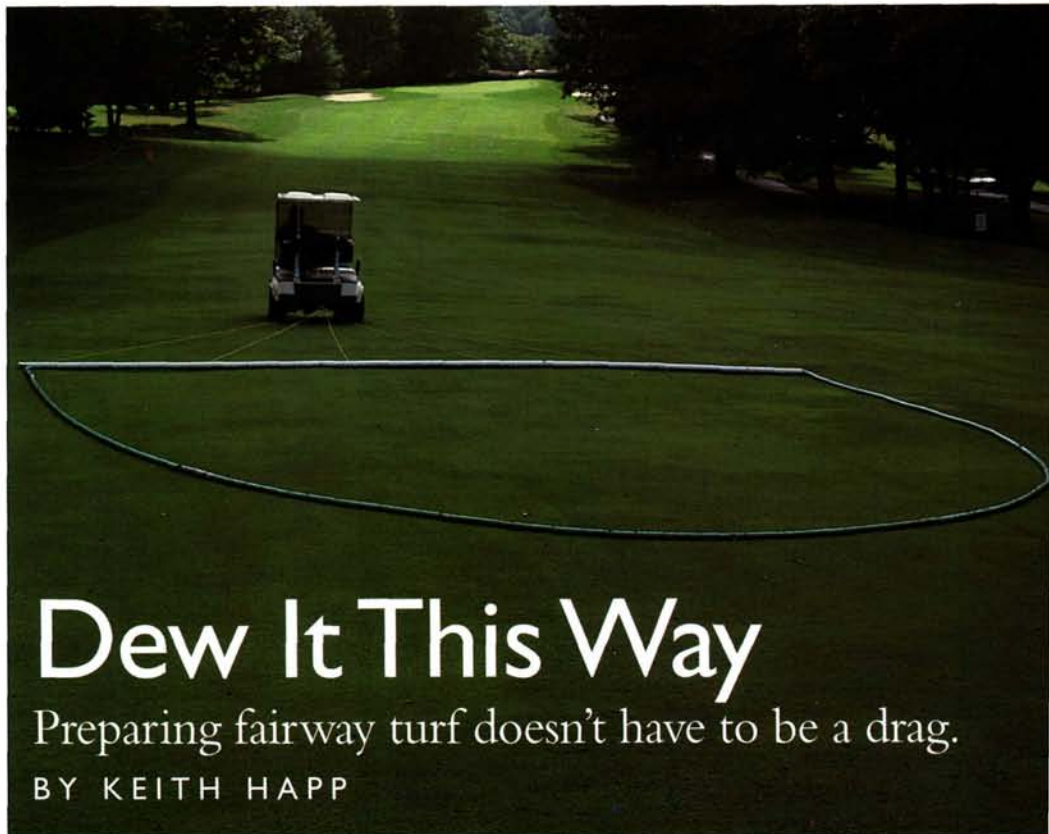
process can be finished allows the operator to accomplish this task before regular daily play begins. Dew removal is performed before mowing, and the procedure is repeated in a site-specific manner where clipping dispersal is necessary. Using the drag has allowed course preparation and inspection to be improved without incurring significant added expense.

While several key employees have been trained to drag the fairways, the horticulturist on staff is the primary operator of the drag system during the week. On the weekends another crew member completes the task. Their duties include: dragging fairway turf from the tee to the green, inspecting each tee and green, and scouting for problems that are then communicated to John, his assistant superintendent, or the spray technician. The use of the drag has allowed more people on staff to be involved with fairway preparation. This has provided for better scouting of course conditions. At Rolling Hills

C.C., the practice of dragging the fairway turf has become a routine core component of fairway preparation.

While mowing is essential to provide acceptable playing conditions, it is only one piece of the preparation puzzle. Dragging the fairway turf removes dew from leaf blades, disperses clumps of grass clippings, aids in the management of many turf diseases, and provides an opportunity to scout the course prior to play. Scouting is a major component of IPM, and any level of increased turf inspection can lead to better control of pest problems. Dragging fairway turf can be an aid to presenting an agronomically strong and aesthetically pleasing product. Preparing fairway turf doesn't have to be a drag, so don't rule out the option to use one.

KEITH A. HAPP is an agronomist in the Mid-Atlantic Region, visiting courses in the states of Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia.



Dew It This Way

Preparing fairway turf doesn't have to be a drag.

BY KEITH HAPP

The practice of dragging fairways can be developed into a routine maintenance exercise that helps prepare the turf for play while also aiding pest control strategies.