



Welcomed Mats for Small Practice Tees

Which is better for a small practice tee — artificial turf or bare ground?

BY TODD LOWE

The popularity of golf has grown to the point that, not only do most golfers know the names of top golfers like Tiger Woods, we also know the names of instructors like Butch Harmon and David Leadbetter. These instructors are popular on the Golf Channel, teaching various techniques on everything from straightening a slice to achieving greater distance. Practice makes perfect and, in the attempt to attain perfection, more golfers practice now than ever before.

Unlike Tiger Woods, though, turfgrass species are not machines and suffer from the wear and tear of daily play. Increased foot traffic and iron shots take their toll on practice tees, which become especially weakened during peak seasons. Reestablishing turf by seed or from surrounding vegetation is necessary to fill in thin areas and provide proper cover. If adequate time is not allowed in between

these intervals, practice tees remain thin or, even worse, bare.

Practice tee size averages between 30,000 and 75,000 square feet, depending on the amount of usage. Large tees provide appropriate turfgrass recovery, and a mistake of many golf courses is installing small practice tees that remain excessively worn. The obvious solution is to increase the teeing area, but this may not be possible on some courses due to inadequate space. A possible solution to improve turfgrass recovery and overall aesthetics is installing artificial teeing surfaces.

Artificial surfaces can be used to alleviate some of the stress from routine play by alternating them into the regular tee rotation as needed. Also, unlike turfgrasses, artificial turf does not suffer from environmental stress and can be used during rainy weather or during winter months on northern courses.

There are various types of surfaces available, but most courses prefer low-

maintenance mats that do not require topdressing with sand or crumb rubber. Surfaces with long fibers are more realistic but require intensive maintenance. These surfaces also must be buried in the ground, and replacing them is difficult. A concrete foundation should be installed below the mats so that the teeing surface does not become unlevel and aesthetically unappealing. Some courses partially enclose these artificial teeing areas to protect golfers from the elements and provide shade.

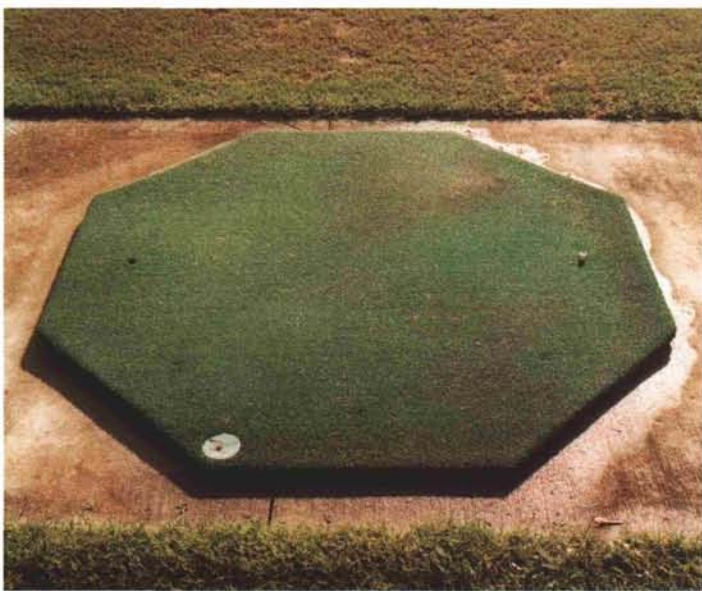
Some members do not welcome the use of artificial turf because it does not simulate the feel of golf course turf, but then again, neither does bare ground. Golfers must realize the impact of increased stress on small tees and see the long-term benefit of these artificial mats.

TODD LOWE is an agronomist for the Green Section's Florida Region.

Use of practice tees has exploded in recent years. Artificial teeing surfaces are viable alternatives to natural turf and are available in a wide variety of shapes, sizes, materials, and costs.



Newer artificial mat designs provide a more realistic feel, but they require more upkeep. Some can be easily removed for maintenance.



The shape of this mat allows it to be rotated to help spread wear over the surface.