

Bring Back Brushing!

A simple practice that will improve your greens.

BY BRIAN WHITLARK

Turf managers are always looking for a way to improve the quality of their putting surfaces. This article focuses on a simple strategy that will yield better greens. Brushing greens before mowing offers surfaces that are smoother and contain less grain. In Dr. Beard's book *Turfgrass Management for Golf Courses*, brushing is defined as "... the practice of moving a brush against the surface of a turf to lift nonvertical stolons and/or leaves before mowing to produce a uniform surface of erect leaves."

In the 1970s, brushing was referred to as "switching" greens and was employed primarily for dew removal. The popularity of brushing greens progressed from there, but has hit a plateau in recent years. That plateau is due in part to a lack of progression in brush technology. Brushes that most turf managers are familiar with have



Although the front-mounted brushes mounted on walking greens mowers are popular and can be effective, new brushes entering the market offer substantial improvements over their predecessors.



These brush styles are gear-driven and counter-rotate when mounted on the John Deere walking greens mowers. The spiral version in the foreground is not nearly as aggressive as the brush (top) designed by Rodney Lingle, superintendent at Memphis Country Club.

failed to yield results that meet expectations, but what should turf managers expect from brushing? They should expect to see an improvement where it matters most — in putting quality. Furthermore, turf managers should expect to see benefits such as:

- Grain reduction.
- Raising stolons and shoots, which produces a better cut.
- A less injurious technique than vertical mowing or grooming, and therefore can be used more frequently and during periods when growth is not aggressively active.
- A method for *Poa annua* seedhead reduction.

Unfortunately, the brushes that most turf managers use or have used are not aggressive enough to consistently improve putting quality. Such brushes can be divided into two categories — gear-driven or front-mounted. The gear-driven brushes failed to meet the mark as a result of their architecture. They are either constructed in a spiral orientation, which pulls the mower to the right, or they simply lack enough bristles to be effective.



Turf managers who use riding greens mowers are not without options. Some manufacturers offer brushes designed for their mowers, and the brush pictured here can be equipped on most John Deere, Jacobsen, or Toro models.

The popularity of the front-mounted brushes grew as a result of the ineffectiveness of the mechanically driven alternatives. However, even the most widely used front-mounted brushes are unstable, are not durable, and are not substantially more aggressive than their gear-driven counterparts. Moreover, these units do not offer the ability to adjust the brush contact angle. In search of a more aggressive option, turf managers have modified the front-mounted brushes by adding weights and/or trimming down the bristles. Such modifications may result in more forceful contact with the turf surface, but the brushes often don't last or are unbalanced and bounce across the turf.

The style of brush turf managers are accustomed to fails in comparison to new brush technology. The remainder of this article will introduce readers to three new brushes to try for course operations. The following list is not all inclusive, and as such, there may be

additional brushes that are equally effective and available for turf managers.

1. The first brush is a gear-driven unit that fits the John Deere walking and riding mowers and fairway units (Greensperfection.com). It is equipped with 12 rows of bristles, which is substantially more than current brushes on the market. The brush is offered in several stiffness options and is mounted in the same location as the groomer. The brush height can be adjusted with the use of a Groomer-Gage® to achieve a desired level of aggressiveness. When mounted on the John Deere greens mower, the brush counter-rotates and casts sand and clippings forward into the basket, rather than back into the cutting reel.

2. The second brush is offered from Turfscience, Inc., of Phoenix, Ariz. This is a front-mounted brush that can be mounted on either John Deere or Toro walking greens mowers. The brush is offered in three stiffness options, and the turf manager has the ability to modify the angle of contact with the turf. The brush is 2.5 times the width of current

brushes on the market. One of the best attributes of this brush is the robust frame, which yields a very sturdy and durable unit.

3. The third brush is made specifically for riding greens mowers and can be mounted on Jacobsen, John Deere, or Toro models. The brush head is adjustable and the frame is constructed from steel and is powder coated to extend its useful life. This brush is offered by TC Group, LLC, and additional information can be found at www.brushattachment.com.

A word of caution: When one of these brushes is used for the first time, turf quality will likely decrease before it improves. Depending on the turf variety, growth rate, thatch, and grain in the surface, putting quality may not improve until the turf adapts to its new upright environment. Be patient, and as long as the turf is healthy, keep brushing.

Brushing before mowing is not a new technology, but this practice should see widespread renewed interest, given recent developments in brush design. When brushing is employed as a regular tool in a sound greens management program, this practice will improve putting surfaces.

BRIAN WHITLARK promotes brushing greens in the Southwest Region of the USGA Green Section.



This front-mounted brush is 2.5 times as deep as currently available models. It can be mounted on some John Deere and Toro walking greens mowers. This brush can be easily adjusted to increase or decrease the impact it has on the turf.