

Turf

On the Golf Course: 10 Ways to Work More Wisely

by Gordon Witteveen

There may be more than one way to skin a cat. But short cuts don't always turn out to be time savers and experience can be a long term substitute for an education.

All of these sayings contain a kernel of truth and it is well to remember that our usual way of doing things may not necessarily be the best way. So it never hurts to take a fresh look at long established practices. Perhaps we can do things more efficiently, possibly we can save some money and most importantly, we may also be able to please golfers by providing better results.

Here are 10 random practices that have been examined from a new and a different angle.

- Tees take the worst beating on the golf course. So to reduce wear, tees should be of the same size as greens in area on par-4 and par-5 holes. On the par-3's, the teeing area should be at least twice the size of greens. Few golf courses measure up to these standards. On multiple tee decks, the traffic should be distributed evenly. Four evenly sized tees, for example, should each receive 25% of the total play. At many courses the forward tees and the championships tees look immaculate but the centre tees are divot-scarred and worn out.

My advice: Don't hesitate to stray from the permanent markers in order to save the grass. Another recommendation: Apply extra fertilizer to the teeing grounds to force grass growth and finally, find time to fill in the divots regularly.

- At most golf courses there is at least one problem green. In the spring, such greens often start the season looking great, thus providing us with a false sense of confidence. Come mid-summer, the turf has once again grown sparse and algae are creeping in from the edges. One way to avoid this calamity is to apply several preventative fungicidal sprays early in the season beginning in April. In May, while the problem green is still strong, it's a good time to aerate and topdress grass matt. Then, with the arrival of the dog days of summer, lay-off and hold back on all but essential practices. Treat such greens gently during the heat of July and August. Keep them on the dry side and move the cup daily, at times even twice daily.

- Stay away from snake oil remedies! At least once or twice during the golfing season some fast-talking salesman will come along with a cure-all for all manner of problems ranging from localized dry spots and hard-to-kill weeds to smelly ballwashers. Be prepared and be skeptical. Their credentials may range from having sold penny stocks on the Vancouver stock exchange or encyclopedias to Somali immigrants. On rare occasions I have applied their evil potions to a small

section of our nursery, always with the same results: No difference!

My advice is to stick with well known and trustworthy jobbers who call regularly and deliver when help is truly needed.

- Dew removal is a beneficial practice that is making a comeback. It not only benefits the golfers but also the grass. Dry grass is easier to cut and the quality of cut is improved with the dew removed. Dew whipping all the greens prior to cutting is impractical in most cases. On fairways there is an easy method: Drag a heavy hose, rope or chain between two carts from green to tee. The dew is skimmed off in a jiffy. The job can easily be done in an hour by two experienced workers. Some smart superintendents remove the dew from green, tee and fairway prior to play and prior to cutting. The golfers don't even know it's happening but they appreciate the results just the same.

- Spring is not the time for renovation and construction. Resist all efforts to undertake major projects in April, May and June. Invariably such work will be at the expense of regular maintenance and the condition of your course will suffer. Instead, postpone such work till fall when experienced help is at hand and the work can be done twice as efficiently and with no ill effects to the condition of the golf course. Of course, outsourcing the construction work in the spring is an attractive but expensive alternative.

- In spite of some of the fancy mowing equipment now available to superintendents, the most practical way to cut a large area of rough is still with an old five-gang, drawn by an old tractor and operated by a retired farmer. That combination will keep going all season long, without interruption and with minimum repairs. What's more, both the tractor and the mowers will retain their value long after they have been written off the books.

- When repairing worn areas and establishing new turf, use some of the new rye grass mixes and cover the seed with a thin layer of weedfree straw. We have often done this while waiting for sod to arrive. An opportune rain makes the seed germinate quickly under the damp straw and by the time we ready to lay sod, green grass has already established itself.

- Have you ever noticed that some of the fanciest gates and entrances hide some of the ugliest mansions. It is frequently that way on golf courses with signs. Granite monuments and handcrafted redwood monstrosities sponsored by banks and insurance companies decorate the tees that are often not worthy of the name. Tees should be perfectly flat, firm, spacious and covered with dense turf. Until that has been accomplished the thought of fancy signs is premature.

- Remember when golf was a game of wide open spaces. If there is one serious sin that I have committed in more than 40 years of greenkeeping, it is having planted too many trees. Greens, tees and fairways have become overgrown with foliage at the expense of the turf and the game of golf. In recent years we have

trimmed many of the trees severely and many trees have been taken down completely. In most cases the golfers don't even miss the trees, as long as you sod the stumps!

- Whether you operate a fancy 36-hole country club or a modest 9-hole country course, your most important asset is the golf course. Not the pro shop, nor the club house but the golf course. If you don't believe me, observe what happens on a rainy day with the course closed: Not a soul in the snack bar, nor in the dining room and in the proshop the kids are putting on the rug with no customers to serve.

**With your priorities thus in place now spend your profits accordingly.
Improve your golf course and watch your profits grow.**