

# TURF TWISTERS

## REDUCE PRESSURES

**Question:** In our area, it never really gets cold enough in the winter for the bermudagrass on the fairways and roughs to go fully dormant and off color. Yet, each year we get a lot of complaints about very tight fairway lies and a loss of definition between the fairway and rough cuts during the primary play season. Also, at some other courses in the area, fairway winter overseeding is being practiced and there is increasing pressure for us to do the same. What are the pros and cons of this practice? (Florida)

**Answer:** For the vast majority of American golfers, the presence of a green turf cover has a big impact on their perception of quality. Winter overseeding of bermudagrass fairways ensures that the desired aesthetic character and improved overall course definition can be provided. Also, fluffier lies occur, which are preferred by average to high handicappers. These are the main benefits of winter overseeding.

As far as negatives, there are several. The main ones would be: additional disruptions and inconveniences during the fall establishment process and spring transition out of the overseeding cover, an impact on year-round health and quality of the base bermudagrass, and the cost. Along with the cost of the overseeding material, a mowing frequency of at least three days per week and preferably daily mowing needs to be practiced. This consumes a large number of manpower hours and exerts additional wear and tear on the equipment, which in turn shortens its life. Doubling the cost of the overseeding material is sometimes used as a means of estimating the total cost of this practice. With golfers being so color conscious, no doubt winter overseeding of bermudagrass fairways is here to stay. Yet from the agronomic standpoint, the compromises that must be made are difficult to justify in a lot of cases.

## WHEN MIXING

**Question:** Why do the USGA's guidelines for green construction call for *off-site* mixing? Commercial blenders often mix on the golf course in a parking lot or open area.

**Answer:** The term *off-site mixing* is often confused. The USGA's guidelines call for the mixing of the rootzone materials (sand, organic material, etc.) **outside of the green cavity**. This is referred to as *off-site*. The most common example of off-site mixing is the use of a commercial blender located at the sand plant or somewhere on the golf course (often a parking lot). The rootzone material is blended and then hauled to the green site, where it is dumped into the cavity.

Although the practice is less common these days with the availability of commercial blenders, there continue to be instances where a rootzone is constructed by placing sand in the cavity, overlaying the sand with organic matter, and then rototilling the two together. This is referred to as *on-site mixing*. Since it is impossible to get a uniform blend of the materials throughout the entire depth of the root-zone with this method of mixing, the USGA discourages on-site mixing.

## TREES AND TURF

**Question:** Many golfers become emotional with any mention of tree removal on our course. Other than the debris they leave after a wind storm, what are the major reasons why trees and turf do not mix well, and how do I get the golfers to understand? (Washington)

**Answer:** First, don't try to overcome the emotional response with any emotion of the opposite opinion. Failure is guaranteed! Trees and turf do not mix well due to the reduction of light (food) to the grass, competition from tree roots (water and fertilizer) with the grass, and the stress of traffic. Two methods have proven successful when dealing with this topic. Research from the 1930s visually shows the impact of trees on turf root growth — especially morning sunlight! Your local USGA Green Section office has copies of this research for use as a communication tool. For trees that are directly in the line of play, ask the question, "If the tree in question was not there, would you plant one in the same place?" The obvious answer will be no, because trees are not planted in the middle of fairways!