

Better Turf for a Better Game

Improve the soil to make better conditions.

BY JOSHUA CONWAY

The Kinloch Golf Club is a private, parkland-style, 18-hole golf course near Richmond in Manakin-Sabot, Virginia. Kinloch was designed by Lester George and the famed amateur champion Vinny Giles. Originally conceived as a daily-fee facility with warm-season grasses before construction commenced, Kinloch quickly evolved into an award-winning private golf experience with all cool-season grasses. “[It] is intended first and foremost to be a first-class golf club emphasizing immaculate conditioning, a simple but special clubhouse facility, a small and compatible membership of individual members, a championship golf course and practice facility with service of the highest quality,” states Vinny Giles, one of three principals.

Opening in April of 2001, Kinloch Golf Club was later awarded the “#1 Best Private New Course in America” by *Golf Digest* magazine. As membership grew, the recognition from major golf publications continued, and Kinloch has played host for many national tournaments. In September, Kinloch Golf Club will welcome the 2011 USGA Senior Amateur tournament.

Upholding a commitment to the traditions of the game and the quality of the world-class golf, Kinloch staff have worked to implement an environmental management plan that improves efficiency, conserves resources, and promotes conservation endeavors. In March of 2010, Kinloch Golf Club was designated as a Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary by Audubon International. “We are all stewards of the environment,” says Peter Wendt, C.G.C.S., Golf Course Manager for Kinloch Golf Club.

In early 2001, Wendt and other staff began a soil remediation project to improve soil conditions throughout the golf course. The red clay soils located



in the Piedmont region of central Virginia can hardly be described as an ideal growth medium for turfgrasses. Poor water infiltration, lack of organic matter, and ease of compaction are just some of the challenges area superintendents face.

In order to improve these soil conditions, Wendt decided to implement a program to incorporate organic matter into the soil. The idea was that the compost would improve the soil and increase the suitability of the growing environment. After sourcing a local and affordable vendor for compost material, Wendt ordered bulk shipments and stored it on-site in covered bays.

Throughout the winter months, the compost was applied to the 96 acres of Kentucky bluegrass rough, using a wide-area broadcast spreader. The entire application process required one staff member and took approximately 32 man-hours. Additionally, in 2003, Wendt's staff began over-seeding the rough with turf-type tall fescue varieties. “By promoting better plant health and thus improving the ability of the turf to defend against insects, pathogens, heat, and drought stress, we are able to reduce our chemical and water use,” relates Wendt.

Initially, the benefit of the added compost was minimal. However, “in the years since, we have noticed a

dramatic improvement in plant health,” states Wendt. “The addition of the compost has resulted in a more sustainable soil composition and led to the development of a deeper root system. In turn, these results have reduced the amount of water needed because the fescue is healthier.” Reduction in disease and natural competition has also reduced the man-hours needed to apply fungicides and herbicides.

While soil remediation may not be particularly exciting, healthier turfgrass makes the effort worth it from both a playability and environmental standpoint. “It is also a worthy investment that benefits the bottom line,” states Joellen Lampman, Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program Director. “It's important to recognize that projects such as this can take many years to show results. Kudos to Peter and his staff for sticking with the program through the beginning stages when the benefits were minimal.”

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