



grounds newsletter

Fall has arrived and the leaves are finally coming down faster than we can clean. It has been an inconsistent autumn as we have experienced some warm sunny days, cold wet rainy days, and our first snowfall on November 1st (aka a normal fall in Michigan). I would like to think our staff is able to slow down this time of year but we remain busy trying to prepare before winter.

Thank you for your patience over the past couple weeks as we have been careful with cart usage. Limiting carts at any point during the season is not a decision we take lightly. The health of the golf course this time of year has a direct impact on the ability to survive winter and conditions in the spring. The turf is putting more energy into food storage than top growth so it does not recover from damage and traffic as it would during the spring and summer.

As you probably know we have decided to close the golf course for the season. This is another decision we do not take lightly. My main motivation in this profession is to provide a product the membership can enjoy. Closing the course gives me the least amount of enjoyment but I believe it is the best decision long term.

One of the most difficult parts of being a superintendent is trying to predict the weather. The forecast shows dry weather through November 16th then cold and rain. We have a couple more processes to complete before the weather turns.



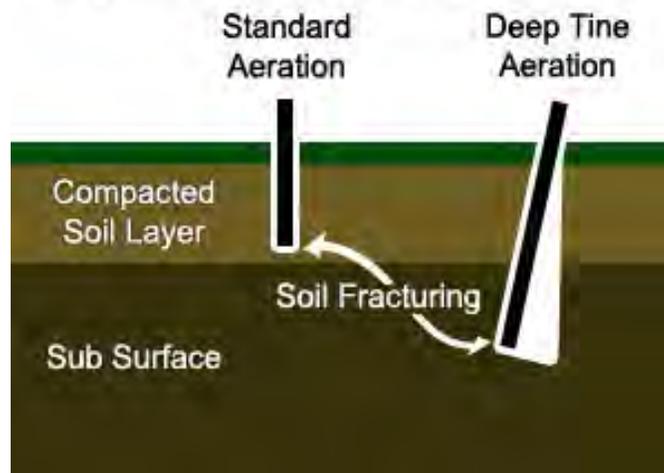
DEEP TINE AERIFICATION EAST/WEST GREENS

The East/West greens are aerified using a deep tine machine just before winter. This is different than our solid tine aerification process performed in September. Deep tines work at roughly an 8 inch depth while our solid tines work at about a 3 to 4 inch depth. Deep tining also alleviates more compaction and provides better drainage. This process has season long benefit but there is a strategy behind the timing of this process.

Ice formation on greens is a concern throughout the winter. Ice is more likely to form on poorly drained greens. Deep tining just before winter has the potential to maximize drainage in an attempt to prevent or lessen ice formation. Preventing ice and winter damage is never a guarantee but we try to strategize the best we can.



Advantage of Deep Tine Aeration



HEAVY SAND TOPDRESS APPLICATION

One of our final processes going into winter is to heavily topdress the greens with sand. The sand spreads most evenly when dry producing consistent results and avoiding suffocation to the turf. The greens and surrounds should also be dry enough to handle the weight and tires of the topdress equipment.

A heavy sand application has long term benefits and an accumulative effect by smoothing the putting surface, improving firmness, and enhancing drainage. It also serves as a protective barrier to minimize winterkill. I mentioned ice damage previously but there are several different types of winterkill all brought on by different circumstances. The sand barrier is an important tool for all of these types, including ice damage. Unfortunately, because of the amount of sand applied it renders the greens unplayable.



Heavy sand application to 3 green (2022)



We apply as much sand as possible without suffocating the turf. A rain event will help compact the sand into the canopy.

COVERING PUTTING GREENS

The third strategy we utilize to minimize winterkill is by use of permeable putting green covers. Covers need to be installed before the ground freezes and/or a lasting snowfall. We cover 6 greens that are historically susceptible to winterkill. #1, 3, 6, 10, 11, and 16.

Covers deter a type of winterkill called winter desiccation. Desiccation occurs when the turf is exposed to the harsh winter elements. Snow is the best cover on the market (and cheapest) but in the absence of snow the putting green covers can provide some protection.

Fortunately, widespread winterkill has been a rare occurrence over the 100 plus history of the golf course because of the other strategies we employ, such as sand topdressing. Because of this, I do not think we need to cover more than 6 greens at this time. If winterkill starts to become more prevalent in the future I would discuss covering additional greens.



Roughly 3,000 sod staples are used to secure the 6 covers so they do not get blown off by wind.

LEAF CLEAN UP

It often feels like leaf clean up never ends and reminds me of the movie Groundhog Day. I'm sure you experience the same with your own lawn. I think we are nearing the finish line and have a couple weeks remaining. Instead of using a vacuum we either manually pick up the leaves or mulch them into the rough using our mowers. It is important that we mulch in areas where the grass is dense and in full sunlight.

I would recommend you do the same if you mulch or have a vacuum attachment on a mower in your own lawn. If possible, try to avoid mulching and driving mowers under trees or where the grass is thin.

The biggest hurdle to mulching is the golf course needs to be dry enough to tolerate our heavy equipment without damage. Thank you for your understanding on the days it was too wet for us to clean leaves.



We use backpack blowers on greens, tees, and hillsides to minimize damage to these surfaces.



Our staff is off somewhere on foot blowing leaves because the golf course is too wet to access with heavy equipment.



Blowing leaves into a wide open area out of play is best. The swale between 2 green and 5 tee is a perfect location.



It can take up to 40 minutes to properly mulch a pile of leaves depending on the size and location of the pile.

IRRIGATION SYSTEM WINTERIZATION

Obviously, with freezing temperatures in the near future the irrigation system needs to be winterized. This process takes 2 days to complete and includes the East/West, Park, and clubhouse irrigation plus the potable water lines for the drinking fountains and halfway house.



2 air compressors are hooked into the piping to provide enough pressure and volume to clear the irrigation system of water

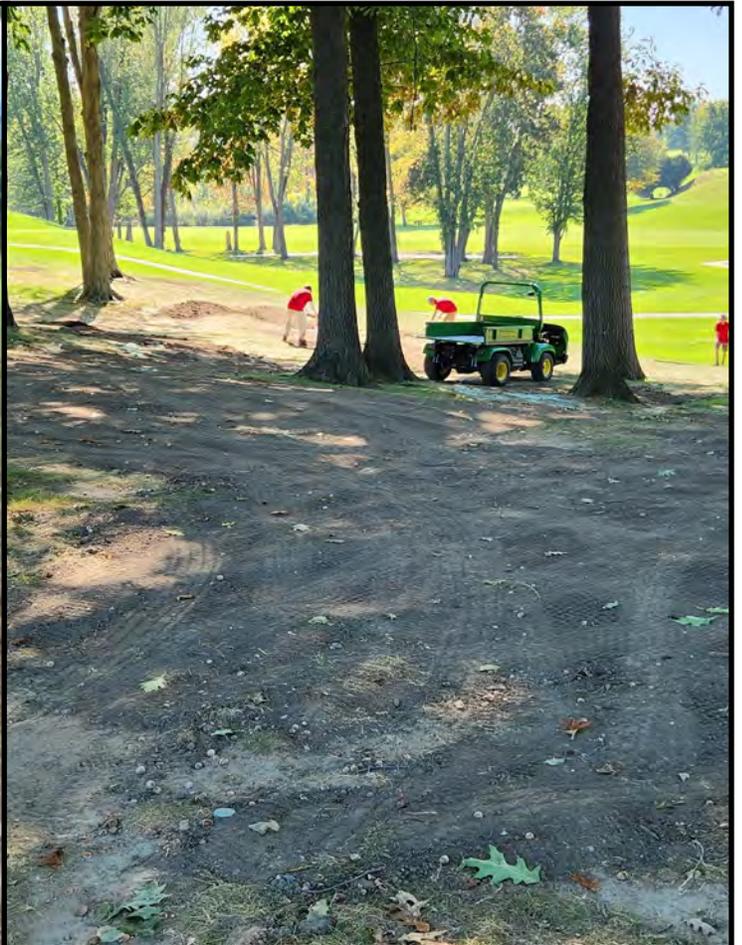


There is enough air volume to run only about 12 heads at one time. The East/West has roughly 1,300 sprinkler heads total.

SEEDING BETWEEN #14/15

Our crew prepared the wooded area between 14 and 15 for seed by covering exposed roots and filling holes with soil. The area was then seeded using our slit seeder in 2 different directions. We have good germination in this area and it will be seeded again in the spring to get better density. The surrounding trees make this a difficult location to grow grass because of shade and nutrient competition. Also, it has poor irrigation coverage and the soil does not hold much moisture. The goal is to steadily improve this area every year until we achieve full coverage with grass.





Seedlings establishing between 14 and 15. As the seedlings mature density will improve.

SEEDING LEFT OF 7 TEE and 5 GREEN

In the April newsletter I highlighted our work clearing the underbrush left of #7 tee in order to establish native grass. The idea is to mimic the left of hole #5. We spent the summer eradicating weeds to prepare for seed. The area has been hydroseeded and we have great germination. I would expect some more seeding to occur in the spring, specifically on the hillside but we are off to a very good start.



Hydroseeding Left of 7 Tee



December 2022



November 2023 (Grass Germinating)



Left of #7 Tee (The stumps will be removed after full establishment. We experienced a timing issue with stump removal previous to seeding)



We have seed germinating in the bare area next to 5 green as well.

ORNAMENTAL GRASS AND PERENNIALS

The Club is fortunate to have our horticulturist, Rob Goff. He does a great job with the clubhouse grounds and landscape. He uses very few annuals around the property so we spend a lot of time cutting back ornamental grasses and perennials. We are in the process of cutting back our plants. Some ornamental grasses and perennials can be left all winter to provide interest in the landscape. Others need to be cut back because they become unsightly.





The sedum remains until spring to provide some color and texture to the landscape through winter.

EQUIPMENT DETAIL

After the grass stops growing we detail all of our equipment before it goes through winter maintenance. It is important to maintain quality equipment not only to uphold a Club standard in appearance but also to ensure performance.



You may have noticed a new fleet of John Deere equipment on property this season. Historically, the club has purchased and replaced about 4 to 5 pieces of equipment annually to upgrade and maintain the fleet. Daily mowing equipment has typically been replaced every 5 to 7 years based on the hours and function of the item. Often after 5 years of use the repair cost begins to increase and performance declines.

Last fall, The Club evaluated the strategy of replacing equipment through yearly purchases versus a 5 year lease. Upon evaluation it was realized that the total cost of purchasing 4 to 5 items yearly vs leasing all items was very similar over the span of 5 years. With similar cost and the ability to upgrade all equipment in the same year The Club changed strategy and moved forward with the lease option. There are too many details to cover in this short article but the lease option also comes with a 5 year warranty on all items, the ability to adapt with changing technology, and improved performance for better quality, just to name a few.

Equipment is only second to the staff in terms of the Clubs most valuable asset. Without staff and equipment even the best plan could not be accomplished. The Club has done a great job for, at least, the past 30 years upgrading equipment.

Thank you for a fantastic season and your show of support for your club in all phases. I feel very fortunate to work for a facility with members that take great pride in their club.

Andy Gianino
Golf Course Superintendent