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Establishing a Golf Facility: Turfgrass Sod vs. Seeding (Part I of III)

The debate rages on: in northern climates should you use turfgrass sod to establish a golf course or the traditional method of seeding.

Although many exemplary courses have been established entirely with turfgrass sod, the industry continues to be wary of it, mostly because of the perpetuation of sodding myths. You've probably heard some of these myths yourself: *sodding is too expensive*, *turfgrass sod is a waste of money*, *sod creates a layer* and a popular one: *grown-in onsite is perfection*.

In a three-part series we will examine the myths and common misconceptions about using turfgrass sod. This, the first article, discusses the evolution of turfgrass. In Part II (to be published late August), we will look at the benefits of using turfgrass sod, and in Part III (to be published mid September) we will address the financial benefits of establishing a course with turfgrass sod.

After reading these articles we hope that you'll have a better understanding of turfgrass sod and the many benefits of using it.

Evolution of Turfgrass

During the last decade turfgrass sod producers have responded to the specific needs of the golf course industry by adapting new methods of production. This evolution has touched all aspects of turfgrass production from the facilities themselves through to the varieties grown, growing methodologies, and installation equipment. In the remainder of this article, we'll discuss each of these changes, illustrating the benefits of using turfgrass sod while dispelling myths along the way.

Turfgrass Farms

Soil type is one of the key factors to producing successful turfgrass installations. Traditionally turf farms were established on any soil type as long as the field was level. Today, the turfgrass sod suppliers that cater to the golf and sports turf industries are much more particular and only select fields that are either sandy loam or organic-soil based. Why? Turfgrass sod produced on these soil types drain well and do not impede the rapid establishment of roots into the new sites profile.

Improved Varieties

Turfgrass breeders are continually discovering new varieties of turfgrass to meet different needs and climates. Specific to the golf industry, they have released a plethora of new dwarf bluegrass varieties that are superior to their predecessors. Older varieties were often guilty of causing problems onsite due to excessive thatch production that often delayed rooting. The new varieties do not grow as aggressively or produce excessive thatch. Newer bluegrass cultivars also have more rhizome density, which results in increased sod strength, and can be harvested with less soil attached.

Soil Free Technology

The advent of StrathAyr soil free technology addresses the layering issue often associated with Bentgrass greens. Bentgrass sod with soil will create an impediment to the drainage of water if there is a change in particle size compared to the root zone. In the past, high percolation sand greens have been unknowingly capped with a smaller particle size Bentgrass sod leading to shallow rooting and ultimately failures. Because soil free Bentgrass is void of any soil particles at all, it eliminates this

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problem as the sod matches the substrate material perfectly. For more information about soil free turfgrass sod, please see the following article: www.manderley.com/pdf/manderley_soil_free_eng.pdf

Large Roll Production

One of the biggest (and most noticeable) changes to large-scale installations has been the advent of the big roll format of sod production. This machinery has allowed the consistent cut of very large rolls of turf, typically anywhere from 350 to 450 square feet per roll. This evolution has eliminated the labor involved with small roll installations and improved the immediate finish, making instant playability a reality.

In addition, this advancement has been complemented on the installation side through the development of low ground pressure installation and transport equipment. The ability to fully install a fairway in a day is now the norm.

Through the evolution of turfgrass sod production the days of having to deal with inferior turf types grown on incompatible soils has gone by the wayside. Although the myths continue to circulate, those superintendents that utilize specialized turfgrass sod suppliers understand the differences and the greatly improved levels of performance available with today's products and methods.

In our next article (to be published late August) we will tackle the benefits of using turfgrass sod to establish a golf facility.

The articles are published in conjunction with our monthly Manderley newsletter. To be added to the mailing list, please contact info@manderley.com.



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