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Establishing a Golf Facility: Turfgrass Sod vs. Seeding—Technical Benefits (Part II of III)

In a three-part series, Manderley is examining the advantage of using turfgrass sod to establish golf courses. In the first article, we discussed the evolution of the industry, bursting many of the myths against using turfgrass sod. In fact, many exemplary courses have been established entirely with turfgrass sod. (visit: http://www.manderley.com/golf_and_sport/resources.asp) In this installment, we look at the technical benefits of using turfgrass sod. Part III will outline the financial benefits.

The turfgrass sod advantage

Some of the best new courses are ones that have been fully established with turfgrass sod. And, on these courses, it's not uncommon to hear golfers say "plays like a five-year old course" and "the best playing conditions I have experienced, far from what you would expect from a new place". The reason turfgrass-sodded courses generate such rave reviews is that these courses open with well-conditioned playing surfaces that typically would take years to replicate using seed that has to mature under regular playing conditions.

A course established with turfgrass sod plays like a mature course because the turfgrass sod is grown to maturity before it ever hits the course. And, its growing conditions are well controlled. The argument can be made that as superintendents you are experts in growing and maintaining turfgrass, but as producers, we have the added advantage of ideal nursery conditions. Turfgrass sod is grown on soil that is perfect for transplantation with even application of water and nutrients.

This maturity also makes turfgrass sod an ideal choice for the undulations, dry mounds and wet low spots: areas that typically are exceedingly challenging to establish. In fact, quite often turfgrass sod is the only practical way to establish turf in these situations.

Added to the advantage of ideal nursery conditions is the fact that turf farms producers can be selective, supplying only the best material. If there is an imperfection in the sod nursery or material, it is simply not harvested. This means that only pristine turfgrass ends up on your course.

Eliminating wash-out risk

The dreaded word for the grow-in superintendent is "wash-outs" and these days, the stakes are high. As new courses become more sophisticated—with additional features that aim for higher levels of difficulty—the amount of damage that can be caused by summer thunderstorms increases. Depending on the catchment area or the slope, large wash-outs can become prevalent. In mountainous regions attempting to establish golf courses by seed can take several attempts, with a lot of expensive reworking of the finishing required after each storm. But, by using turfgrass, the surface is protected by the best erosion control method provided by Mother Nature. When you put soil in its place and cover it with turfgrass sod, it stays there.

Erosion control to safeguard the environment

Architects are being challenged to create spectacular golf courses in environmentally beautiful and fragile settings, which are often monitored by both environmental stakeholders and authorities. The immediate coverage offered by turfgrass sod is inexpensive insurance to avoid heavy fines and penalties for allowing sediment to enter protected ecosystems. In fact, studies have shown that turfgrass sod provides extremely high levels of soil containment. (Carroll et al, University of Maryland 1998)

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Whether it is holding a slope or protecting a drainage swale, turfgrass sod not only prevents erosion but it provides a natural filter that prevents suspended particles from moving on the course. Turfgrass is well known for its attributes as a soil saver and water cleanser: using turfgrass sod allows you to realize these benefits immediately.

Turfgrass sod meets deadlines

Turfgrass sod gives you peace of mind that you'll meet your opening date. With seed there is always the concern about growing conditions from the time a date is set to opening. So, in addition to the advantages of instant playability as well as wash-out and erosion control, turfgrass sod gives you certainty that you'll be ready on your opening day.

One of the biggest obstacles to using turfgrass sod to establish an entire golf course is the perception that it's a luxury. In our next installment (to be published mid-September) we will show you how turfgrass sod is not expensive but in fact, actually makes you money.

These 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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