

Ball Marks to Bentgrass

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GOLFERS and superintendents alike have struggled for years with the ball mark dilemma. Superintendents and course officials argue that most golfers do not even try to fix their ball marks, yet most golfers protest that they fix many more than they make. The truth of the matter is, even when golfers do fix their ball marks, most are fixed improperly. This can be a result of a weak effort at ball mark repair or the turf being too severely damaged to begin with.

Ball mark damage can be a problem on almost any course, and it can be an especially tough problem on heavily played golf courses. Short holes where irons are used to hit to small greens are usually the most affected. The inevitable result is scarred, damaged putting green turf that looks bad and plays poorly.

There are numerous ball mark repair tools for sale, and a quick trip around any trade show will yield an array of different tools in all shapes and sizes. The idea behind most of these gadgets is to provide a method of quickly and efficiently smoothing the putting green surface (preferably without bending over). Few golfers put much, if any, emphasis on helping the turf heal more rapidly, however. That is why Angelo Petraglia's idea is such a good one.

Angelo is the golf course superintendent at Deal Golf & Country Club in Deal, New Jersey. This is an old course with small, severely undulating greens, and ball marks presented a real challenge. The greens were comprised mainly of *Poa annua* when Angelo took over a few years ago. The combination of the ball marks and too much *Poa annua* prompted Angelo to come up with this turf tip. Initially, his idea was to use a broken golf shaft adapted into a soil probe to take a core out of the center of each ball mark. The edges of the holes were rolled inward with a twist of an index finger, and the small hole was then kneaded closed with an ice pick. This idea works extremely well on small ball marks, the smaller of which can be completely eliminated.

This technique helped solve Angelo's ball mark problem, but it had no effect on grass populations. So, Angelo took the idea one step further and now removes a larger, deeper core, $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch in diameter and 3 inches deep. This is accomplished with a homemade plugging device fashioned from a $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch fairway aerifier tine attached to a short length of 2-inch PVC pipe with the aid of several adapters. The cores simply back up inside the PVC pipe and are discarded periodically. This larger hole is

backfilled with a mixture of creeping bentgrass seed and topdressing material. A commercially available mechanical ball mark repair tool then is used to knead the larger hole closed. The final step is to add an additional dusting of the seed/topdressing mixture so that the surface is left perfectly smooth. The result is a smooth putting surface, with improved soil structure and more bentgrass.

Though it may sound a bit labor intensive, you might be surprised at the actual labor breakdown this technique requires. For the sake of efficiency, Angelo sends three crew members out together. Each performs one phase of the operation. They can do the most severely damaged holes, including the four par 3s, in $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours, but it requires a total of just 3 hours to do all 18 greens. Angelo's practice has been to repair ball marks on the par-3 holes every week during the peak play months of June, July, and August, and the whole course is done every other week. Depending on the number of greens repaired, the program requires $4\frac{1}{2}$ to 9 man-hours per week. After just two seasons of use, the results are very positive: Ball marks no longer are the problem they once were, and small patches of bentgrass exist throughout the greens.

Ball mark repair tools.



Removal of core from center of ball mark.



Kneading the hole closed.

