

'O HOLEY NIGHT'

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Spring Valley Country Club in Sharon, Massachusetts, has found performing aerification at night to be a very beneficial solution.

AERIFICATION is not always the easiest maintenance practice to carry out during the golfing season. Greens aerification leaves holes in the putting surface that affect ball roll and make putting difficult, and most golfers do not enjoy playing on a freshly aerified green. Late summer (mid to late August) is an optimum time to aerify greens in New England, but this is also peak golf time. The conflict between golf and aerifying is perpetual.

Another problem in the conflict is the potential turf injury caused by aerifying and topdressing during the heat of the day. The edge of an aerification hole is subject to excessive drying. In addition, topdressing sand can heat up during the day, causing even more drying and potential turf injury.

High sunlight intensity and temperature act like a catalyst, resulting in damaged, weakened putting surfaces.

Spring Valley Country Club in Sharon, Massachusetts, depends upon regular aerification to improve growing conditions on its severely compacted greens. John Adamonis, golf course superintendent, devised a program that reduces the negatives associated with aerifying. For Spring Valley, performing aerification at night is a logical answer. The golfers are home in bed, temperatures are cool, and there are no interruptions. Benefits of this program are:

1. Minimized turf stress.
2. Reduced interference with golfers.
3. A safe work environment (staff works without danger from golf balls).

4. Decreased labor intensity.

Good preparation is critical. Equipment breakdown during aerification can delay the procedure, thus extending the completion time. Aerification must be completed in the shortest time frame possible, and a practice run before the scheduled aerification helps minimize potential problems.

Mr. Adamonis tests the equipment on a practice green two weeks prior to the regular aerification. The equipment is serviced and fine-tuned, and inventory is checked for tines, belts, tires, etc. Supplies are stockpiled in preparation for fertilization, overseeding, and topdressing. A four-lamp light tower with a generator is reserved at the local rental store. Four lamps as opposed to two lamps provides a backup in the event of lamp

burnout. The staff makes arrangements for the shift in work hours, and the membership is notified of the pending procedure.

The program starts in the afternoon, following play. If possible, they try to schedule it after a holiday or major golf tournament when course activity the next day will be minimal.

Outline of Procedure and Duties

Monday, 5 P.M.

- Staff: crew assistant, mechanic, and two turf managers report for duty.

- Assistant — oversees the operation. He sets up the light tower, adjusts tine depth, removes flagstick and hole liner, inspects green and equipment.

- Turf manager — operates aerifier in a back-and-forth pattern. All turns are made off the green to minimize turf injury.

- Turf manager — in Spring Valley's case, a Verti-Drain machine is used, which requires a worker to signal the operator to lift and lower tines, and to tamp and repair the turf where needed.

- Mechanic — oversees equipment operation until 9 P.M. and remains "on call" throughout the night.

Monday, 7:30 P.M.

- Lights are turned on.

- The procedure continues through the night. The staff interchanges duties and are familiar with all aspects of the process. Approximately 13 greens are aerified by 5 A.M. Tuesday.

Tuesday, 5 A.M.

- Shift change.

- A new three-person crew finishes aerifying the remaining six greens by 12 noon.

- Simultaneously, a staff of four begins topdressing, fertilizing, dragging, and watering.

- Holes are changed and greens inspected.

Tuesday, 1:30 P.M.

- The course is opened for play.

Minimal interference with the membership and avoiding common stresses associated with aerification make night aerification a great alternative. This is an example of how creative thinking has made room for an important maintenance practice. Too often the decision is made to reschedule maintenance for the benefit of golf, rather than considering the needs of the turf. Put that creative thinking to work for you!



(Top) A generator/four-lamp light tower was rented from a local supplier.

(Above) Checking the results after the sun has come up.