

USGA WEBCAST

CONSIDER THE COST

BY CHRIS HARTWIGER

Examining a USGA survey in the bentgrass versus ultradwarf bermudagrass cost-comparison discussion.

CALCULATING COSTS CONFIDENTLY

COMPARING COSTS BETWEEN CREEPING BENTGRASS AND ULTRADWARF BERMUDAGRASS GREENS

Choices are good, but selecting the best option can be difficult. As decision-makers at golf facilities in the Southeast contemplate whether creeping bentgrass or an ultradwarf bermudagrass better suits their greens, part of their due diligence is comparing annual operating costs. As USGA Green Section agronomists, we often field emails and phone calls asking the question, "What is the annual operating cost differential between creeping bentgrass and ultradwarf bermudagrass putting greens?" This is an excellent question, but a difficult one to answer without site-specific facts. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to help decision makers answer this question by providing a cost-comparison worksheet of bentgrass versus ultradwarf bermudagrass greens in the Southeast.

Why operating costs are difficult to quantify.

Operating costs are difficult to quantify for two primary reasons. First, an accurate accounting of current operating costs for creeping bentgrass is not easy to ascertain. Most golf course budgets are allocated by line items, not by playing area of the golf course. For example, the labor line item includes all labor hours. Unless the superintendent accounts for wages devoted to putting green maintenance items, e.g., hand watering, mowing, spraying, etc., these figures are not readily available within the current budget format. Second, the standard to which the ultradwarf bermudagrass is going to be maintained must be known before future cost estimates can be calculated. The higher the standard, the greater maintenance costs will be.

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When surveying superintendents in the Southeast who have converted bentgrass greens to an ultradwarf bermudagrass, core aeration requirements for ultradwarfs remain about the same or even less than bentgrass.

FLUSHING GREENS: MORE THAN JUST HEAVY WATERING

USING CORRECT TECHNIQUES, FLUSHING SALTS IS A PRODUCTIVE PROCEDURE

Flushing greens is certainly not a new concept for golf courses, as many superintendents over the years have used this technique to remove salts from the soil. This practice is particularly common where salt-laden irrigation water is used and in areas along the East Coast, Gulf Coast, California coast and Desert Southwest. However, there are a surprising number of golf facilities that heavily water their greens in a misdirected attempt at flushing, which does not achieve the intended goal and can actually exacerbate salinity problems. This article outlines the following five-step program to effectively flush greens to reduce soil salinity:

1. Soil and water testing
2. Venting or aeration of the soil
3. Applying gypsum, wetting agents and/or soil amendments
4. Flushing
5. Replenishment of nutrients

This is a specific program that requires more than just saturating the greens with water. All steps must be carried out as thoroughly as possible for the most efficient and effective flushing results.

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Flushing requires a considerable amount of water to be effective, often requiring up to two hours of irrigation

FORE THE GOLFER

WHY AERATE THE GREENS?

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View In Spanish: [¿Por Que Airear Los Greens?](#)

May is upon us and aerators are firing up (or soon will be) at golf facilities across the country. Aeration can be a major hassle, so why do it? This short video explains why aeration is such a critical cultural program at your golf facility and how it leads to better putting greens.

RESEARCH THAT MATTERS

ANNUAL BLUEGRASS WEEVILS DO NOT LIKE BENTGRASS

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Annual bluegrass weevil (ABW) is a serious and expanding pest of short-cut turfgrass, especially on golf courses in the northeastern U.S. and Canada. As the name suggests, ABW can seemingly cause preferential damage to *Poa annua* while causing little damage to bentgrass. With support from the USGA, researchers at Rutgers University investigated the tolerance and resistance of several bentgrasses to ABW larval feeding in an effort to better understand this problematic pest.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

WORLD WAR II TAUGHT PEOPLE HOW TO "MAKE-DO"

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As many courses struggle economically, it is always worth looking back to a time when everything was in short supply including staff. One sentence from the March, 1942 issue of *TimelyTurf Topics* (the predecessor to the Green Section Record) sums up challenges of the early World War II years: "In England where no one but old or physically handicapped men and boys under 18 are available for turf maintenance work on golf courses, it has been necessary to give up mowing the greens by hand and to use gang or power mowers." This is an option that is viable to this day. While there are still advantages to the hand mowing of greens, today's triplex greensmowers are engineering marvels. Not only does the quality of the cut match the "walkers", the triplex is now easier to sharpen than ever. Triplexes save labor and time and reduce the need for additional transportation equipment. For the course that is looking to reduce expenses without significantly sacrificing playing quality the lessons learned in 1942 should at least be considered. It is worth taking the time to read the rest of the war-time suggestions if for no other reason than to remind ourselves how good we have it today. (Image courtesy of the O.J. Noer Photo Collection)

REGIONAL UPDATES



REGIONAL UPDATES

The USGA Green Section is divided into eight regions staffed by agronomists who work with golf facilities on care of the golf course. USGA agronomists provide regular regional updates outlining current issues and observations from the field. Be sure to view updates from multiple regions as featured ideas, techniques and solutions to problems often apply to other parts of the country.

NORTHEAST REGION

Winter injury on putting greens is widespread in the Northeast and *Poa annua* has been the common denominator. While nobody likes dead greens, the silver lining for some golf facilities is an opportunity to convert to bentgrass. For others, the waiting game of turf recovery can be difficult to tolerate. [Read More](#)

MID-ATLANTIC REGION

Properly timed, early-season programs are an important part of success for the entire season. Take advantage of the long-awaited spring weather by implementing practices like aeration, applying preemergent herbicides and scouting for annual bluegrass weevils. [Read More](#)



SOUTHEAST REGION

"To sod, or not to sod?" That is the question golf course superintendents in the northern portion of the transition zone with cold-temperature injury on bermudagrass are asking. Unfortunately, there is no commonplace answer. Careful analysis is necessary to determine the best repair strategy for your facility. [Read More](#)



FLORIDA REGION

It's no secret that golf courses can double as habitat for a variety of wildlife, especially in urban landscapes. Habitat for cavity-nesting birds, such as screech owls, can further be improved by installing nesting boxes that golfers and the community can enjoy. [Read More](#)



NORTH-CENTRAL REGION

One, two, tree strikes...you're out! How many strikes do trees around your greens get? If you're serious about promoting recovery on winter-injured greens, and you want to help prevent damage in the future, it may be time to address problematic trees that shade the turf, predispose it to winter injury and slow recovery. [Read More](#)



MID-CONTINENT REGION

Golf course superintendents try very hard to prevent the development of layers in the upper profile of putting greens. However, sometimes nature can deposit layers on greens in a matter of seconds. Yet another problem associated with drought is the occurrence of dust storms as the photo in this update graphically illustrates. [Read More](#)



NORTHWEST REGION

With cost often being cited as the reason why a golf facility chooses not to subscribe to the Course Consulting Service, let's take a closer look at what you receive in year-round assistance. Act quickly (before May 15) and you can save \$500 off a CCS visit in 2014. [Read More](#)



SOUTHWEST REGION

Want firmer sand on bunker faces to avoid "fried-egg" lies? Proper sand depth is important, but consider raking less or even "smoothing" bunker faces to encourage balls to release from slopes and roll to the bunker floor. [Read More](#)

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Golf House, Far Hills, NJ 07931
USGA Green Section
908.234.2300