

The

lowdown

on



topdressers

Changes in topdressing techniques have prompted manufacturers to offer practical, quick and consistent machines.

Laura Wissman

"Demonstrate, demonstrate, demonstrate" is the advice Larry Gilhuly, director of the USGA Green Section Northwest region, gives to turf managers interested in buying new equipment.

"Don't buy on advice; get the unit to your course," he says. And if you're shopping for a new topdresser, Gilhuly recommends you look for consistency and the ability to get the job done fast.

Fifteen years ago, superintendents topdressed greens two to three times a year with small, labor-intensive equipment.

Monte Stevenson, CGCS at Indian Peaks Golf Course in Lafayette, Colo., remembers years ago when he topdressed only in the spring and fall. "Your crown was buried, and a lot of horizontal growth developed," says the 12-year GCSAA member.

Now he topdresses every two to three weeks, "according to the rate of turf growth to keep the crown of the grass at a level soil profile," he explains.

Some superintendents may apply a light coating of topdressing material as often as every week, driving manufacturers to create larger-capacity equipment designed for speed and efficiency. These larger-capacity topdressers have not only eased the time and labor requirements of frequent application, but also made fairway topdressing possible.

KEY POINTS

- In the past few years, superintendents have recognized the benefits of topdressing lightly and frequently.
- Those who topdress fairways say it allows for longer playability, smoother fairways, winter mowing and possibly a deeper root system. Drawbacks may include added cost, damage to mowers and periodically raising the height of irrigation heads.
- Composted grass clippings and other organic byproducts used as topdressing may save money while improving turf establishment, density and color.
- Crumb rubber topdressing may help improve turf's wear resistance by forming a layer that protects the crown against heavy traffic.
- New methods and materials for topdressing have driven manufacturers to develop faster, more efficient machines with larger capacities.

Topdressers have come a long way in the last 20 years. Today's machines offer features for frequent and lighter applications, as well as larger capacities for topdressing fairways.

Photo courtesy of Textron Turf Care and Specialty Products

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On the fairways

At GCSAA's 1983 conference and show in Atlanta when George Bannerman addressed the advantages of topdressing fairways, many superintendents scoffed at the idea. Today, fairway topdressing is standard practice at golf courses around the world.

Advocates say fairway topdressing allows for longer playability, smoother fairways and easier winter mowing. Some superintendents also believe that fairway topdressing creates a deeper root system, Gilhuly says.

"But it's not for everyone," he adds. Topdressing fairways is costly, it may damage your mowers and it requires periodically raising the height of irrigation heads. "If you have good-draining soil that responds well to aeration, then don't do it," Gilhuly says. Fairway topdressing is practiced primarily in the Pacific Northwest, where the soil is heavy in clay. But it's also valuable in areas that have caliche soil or a high water table.

Marvin Andrews, superintendent at Isleta Eagle Golf Course in Albuquerque, N.M., and an 11-year GCSAA member, topdresses his fairways in the fall after aeration. "We started topdressing the



Photo courtesy of Turfco Manufacturing

Spin spreaders permit fairway topdressing to be accomplished in less time.

fairways on the lower holes (the course has a 100-foot elevation difference) to work the sand in the caliche clay," he says. "It helps the soil drain better and gives it more pore space."

Gilhuly predicts that spin spreaders will eventually replace fairway drop spreaders. "They can topdress nine holes in a day," he says, "But most spin-

ners only spread 1/4-inch of material."

Versatility is another component Gilhuly suggests superintendents shop for when choosing a topdresser. Most topdressers will perform a variety of tasks with a diverse assortment of material.

Recycled material

With landfill space diminishing, waste disposal becoming more expensive and superintendents continually emphasizing environmental stewardship, two new topdressing materials — compost and crumb rubber — have gained popularity.

Superintendents who process grass clippings and other organic byproducts into topdressing material say they are saving money while improving turf establishment, density and color. Paul R. Latshaw, superintendent at Congressional Country Club in Bethesda, Md., uses grass clippings in the deep rough and wooded areas primarily to save dumping costs. The 32-year GCSAA member estimates he saves \$380 a week.

Michael Swing, CGCS at Seven Oaks Country Club in Bakersfield, Calif., and



Photo courtesy of The Toro Co.

Experts recommend that superintendents choose versatile topdressers. Most machines will perform several tasks with a wide variety of material.

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a 20-year GCSAA member, mixes his clippings with spent flowers, leaves and chippings for organic fertilizer. "The nature of our soil is very sandy, and the biological activity of compost gives the soil more life," he says.

Swing says he uses 80 percent of the compost as a cover when overseeding tees. The rest is used to add heat to the bermudagrass in the spring and to fertilize oak trees, or is mixed with sand to mend tee divots.

Latshaw tried compost made of brewer's yeast and woodchips one winter and says he was truly amazed at how much greener and healthier the turf became in just one application. He has also used crumb rubber in his turf maintenance program.

Those who've used crumb rubber say it produces wear resistant turf by forming a layer that protects the crown against heavy traffic. "I treated a lot of areas at Congressional — around the greens, between the bunkers and around car paths, wherever there's high traffic," Latshaw says. "It's a good tool."

Stevenson first tested crumb rubber in the fall of 1996. He says the area treated with crumb rubber was the only one that stayed green through the winter. Crumb rubber also helped his troubled spots do well in the extreme heat of summer. Now he uses approximately 12 tons of the material a year.

"Members responded favorably," he said. "They noticed the green at the end of the car path and liked the recycling aspects."

Stevenson suggests that turf managers interested in using crumb rubber run a pilot program to make sure it works on site and in their climates. He also recommends involving the general manager and members. "Most of all, take lots of pictures," he says.

Gilhuly adds that to use the crumb rubber topdressing material successfully, turf must be growing actively, and three applications of ¼ inch are needed. "And if it's wet, forget it," he says. "One trick that worked in the Southeast was

topdressing sod with crumb rubber in a nursery, later moving it to the trouble spots and protecting it for a few weeks."

With the demands of today's high-pressure golf world, both superintendents and manufacturers must keep up with all the tricks and trends in the golf course maintenance industry. Experts recommend testing every product to ensure manufacturers' solutions don't end up in your equipment graveyard.

Topdresser roundup

The following section includes descriptions of various topdresser product lines. *GCM* attempted to contact as many manufacturers as possible. Those who responded to the product query in time to meet the deadline are included.

The **Cushman TC 2000**, from **Textron Turf Care and Specialty Products**, a fifth-wheel topdresser, is big enough to cover large areas quickly and light enough to use on greens, the company says. Its hopper can hold up to 2,500 pounds of material and exerts 12 psi of ground pressure. A hydraulic motor powers a conveyor that feeds material through a rotating brush. The addition of the Turf-Truckster's ground speed governor will add a spreading thickness over a 60-inch swath.



Photo courtesy of Textron Turf Care and Specialty Products

The Cushman line also offers the TD 1500, which mounts on a Turf-Truckster. The company says the textured surface design of the conveyor belt distributes materials evenly for maximum effect on greens and fairways. It has a 1,900-pound hopper capacity, 60-inch spread width and an auxiliary hydraulic control that is operated from

the driver's seat of the Turf-Truckster.

The latest generation of **Vicon** spreaders includes hopper capacities from 600 to 1650 liters (approximately 545-1,500 pounds). A working width of 12 meters (approximately 40 feet) can be increased to 15 meters (approximately 50 feet) and even 18 meters (approximately 60 feet) by adding two deflector plates and a special spout band. The pendulum movement of the spout ensures the application rate is always identical on both sides, the company says. A plastic scale allows continuous application adjustments and an agitator ensures an even material feed to the spreading unit.

Earth & Turf Products offers three models of topdressers for spreading dry



Photo courtesy of Earth & Turf Products

materials. The **Scoop & Spread** loads its own material by hydraulically tilting the hopper downward to a loading position and backing the unit into the topdressing. It has a hopper capacity of 15 cubic feet and a 51-inch spread width. The **Scoop & Spread** has a ground-drive system.

According to the company, the 36-D and 54-D are pull-behind units that have adjustable flow rates and are able to handle variable particle sizes. The 36-D has an 11-cubic-foot capacity and a 36-inch spreading width. The 54-D has a 16.9-cubic-foot capacity and a 36-inch spread width. Both are ground driven.

Dakota Peat Equipment offers two topdressers with spinner attachments that spread material 6-36 feet. The

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Photo courtesy of Dakota Peat Equipment

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Dakota Turf Tender 440 and Turf Tender 420 are designed to handle and spread most material, from grass seed and fertilizer to landscape rock or wood chips, the company says. Both machines feature bucket belting, hydraulic swing-away conveyor, electric vibrator and front-unloading hopper conveyors. The 440 (4.2-cubic-yard capacity) and the 420 (2-cubic-yard capacity) have hydraulic drive systems. Dakota also offers a 220 PTO-driven combined blender/topdresser.

The Millcreek Manufacturing topdresser/spreader was originally designed to



Photo courtesy of Millcreek Manufacturing

disperse collected grass clippings in roughs and out-of-bounds areas. It's now used on fairways for application of compost and topdressing mixtures. Because of the aggressive spreading action, the company says that materials with varying particle sizes are less likely to clog and clump. The rapidly rotating brush breaks clumpy material into smaller particle sizes. The Millcreek machine comes in three sizes: a 1.5-cubic-yard capacity, a 2-cubic-yard capacity and a 4-cubic-yard capacity. It has an adjustable spreading width of 3-10 feet.

Befco Inc.'s power bed and spreader for the 1800 utility vehicle are capable of laying down a $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch-deep covering in a single 14-foot-wide swath, the company says. The spreader features a 13.92-cubic-foot hopper capacity, 20- to 66-foot spread width and a rear uniflow shield to guard against material buildup and spillage.

The Jacobson line from **Textron Turf Care and Specialty Products** offers a choice of two sizes of topdressers to be



Photo courtesy of Textron Turf Care and Specialty Products

mounted on the Jacobsen SV (system vehicle). The 18-cubic-foot hopper and the 11.5-cubic-foot model both have a chevron-pattern belt to provide consistent delivery of wet or dry material. Because material is spread outside the SV's wheel track, it's easier to overlap without driving over fresh topdressing. The topdresser is hydraulically controlled from the SV.



Photo courtesy of Turfco Manufacturing

The newest additions to the **Turfco Manufacturing** topdresser line are the LA4MH and the SP1530.

The LA4MH is both a large area top-

dresser and a material handler. It has a 4-cubic-yard capacity and a walking beam suspension. It also has twin spinners with a spread width of 14-40 feet. The spinners can be angled up and down, aiding in their ability to drive topdressing into the turf. The LA4MH can also load other topdressers and move material for bunker renovations or construction. The Mete-R-Matic III, LA4 tow-type, truck-mounted and self-propelled topdressers feature an adjustable metering gate to control the flow of material as well as a high-speed rotating brush and a heavy-duty chevron-surface conveyor belt.

The SP1530 is a broadcast topdresser designed to also load from the side with a front-end loader. A belt carries the material back to the twin spinners that propel the topdressing material 15-30 feet. The spinners can tilt up and down, allowing the machine to drive the topdressing into the turf to reduce dragging, the company says.

Bannerman Ltd.'s Turf Topper and Super Topper feature the contra-rotation spreader cylinder with small steel paddles that turn upward through the dressing material to grind lumps. A conveyor floor, powered by the tractor hydraulics, consists of a reinforced self-aligning continuous mat. The Super Topper has a 7.5-cubic-yard capacity and a 78-inch spreading width. The Turf Topper has a 3- to 4-cubic-yard capacity and a spreading width of 58 inches. Both topdressers are fitted with large floatation tires for minimum ground compaction.

Ty-Crop Turf Equipment Inc.'s most recent addition, the Quick-Pass 270, has three attachment options — a twin spinner attachment and two brush attachments. The power brush is designed for traditional drop-style topdressing and the vortex brush is designed for applying a light dusting of material.

The TD-460 has a 72-inch spreading width, a spreading depth from $\frac{1}{16}$ inch

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Photo courtesy of Ty-Crop Turf Equipment Inc.

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to several inches and a capacity from 4 yards of heavy material to 7 yards of lightweight material.

The MH-400 features a 4-cubic-yard capacity, an adjustable tailgate for bulk unloading and a back end that can be raised up to 72 inches for loading into greens topdressers, utility vehicles and spreaders. Because the twin spinner attach-

ment spreads material 15-40 feet, the company says the average fairway can be completely topdressed in less than an hour.

The Toro Co.'s Toro 5000 also has a spinner disc. An 8-hp Briggs & Stratton engine powers a 13-inch-diameter spinner assembly capable of spreading material up to 15 feet, the company says. It has a 50-cubic-foot capacity and an adjustable flow rate.



Photo courtesy of The Toro Co.

The 23.5-cubic-foot Toro Topdresser 2300 uses a high-speed brush for even application (light to heavy) from end to end of its 60-inch spread width, the company says. The unit is mounted on a trailer and is towed by a utility vehicle.

Another tow-behind unit, the PA-17, features pendulum spreading action to evenly spread topdressing material up to 20 feet, and fertilizers, seed or lime anywhere from 15-60 feet, the company says. Its capacity is 17.1 cubic feet.

The Toro Topdresser 1800 mounts on the bed of a utility vehicle. It has an 18-cubic-foot capacity, a metering gate, a high-speed brush and a 60-inch swath. ■■■

Laura Wissman is a former GCSAA intern from the school of journalism at the University of Kansas in Lawrence, Kan.

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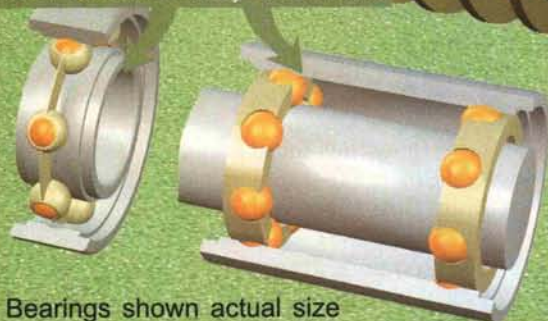
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