



TOP DRESSING

WHY TOP DRESS?

The application of top dressing to turf, in particular putting surfaces, is one of the most important aspects of greenkeeping. The following provides a brief summary detailing the importance of top dressing.

- Dilutes thatch
- Increases depth of quality growing medium.
- Improves drainage.
- Improves surface smoothness and trueness.
- Knock on effects; promotes finer grasses/healthy turf, reduces disease incidence, promotes deep root development, reduces fertiliser and irrigation input.

Top dressing should be undertaken in conjunction with aeration, scarification or verticutting to ensure the fresh material is integrated into the soil profile. Failure to do this may result in layering to the soil profile, which affects moisture movement and root development.

COMPOSITION OF TOP DRESSING

The selection of top dressing material is very important and should follow the guidelines outlined below:

- Select material that is compatible with the underlying growing medium. Do not use material that is finer or more water retentive than the underlying growing medium. For instance, on sand based greens, built to USGA recommendations, the top dressing material should consist of sand with the same particle size as the underlying rootzone. When top dressing greens built on indigenous soil, a material dominated by medium grade (0.25-0.5 mm) sand should be used.
- Ensure the applied material is consistent from one application to the next so a uniform soil profile develops. Remember, the top dressing of today is the rootzone of tomorrow. To ensure quality, ask for specification sheets from your supplier and regularly test the material at an approved independent laboratory.
- Be careful with the amount of organic matter in the mix, as too much will result in surface water retention and soft surfaces. If pure sand is used stick to this policy and do not revert back to a more moisture retentive material.

WHEN TO TOP DRESS

It is important top dressing is applied at the right time. Some guidelines are provided below.

- Only apply material when there is growth. This will ensure the dressing can be absorbed. Applications outside the growing season may smother the turf and/or promote sappy growth, both of which can result in disease activity.



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- Apply at a rate to match the rate of turf growth and thatch accumulation. This will avoid layers developing in the profile, which will affect even moisture movement and root development through the profile. This will require light but frequent applications.
- Avoid applications that exceed the growth rate of the turf (i.e. too heavy a treatment when turf growth is slow) and applying material during periods of turf stress, as this may result in turf thinning and loss of uniformity. This is especially important during periods of drought.

HOW MUCH TO APPLY

The amount of top dressing applied is dependent upon the desired goal, the rate of turf growth, and the composition of the underlying material.

For instance, inland parkland courses on indigenous heavy soil should be applying in the region of 80-100 tonnes of top dressing to all eighteen greens each year. Unfortunately, this is often compromised due to a lack of appropriate machinery, resources and cost. However, clubs that do achieve regular top dressing and hit this target, support better, firmer, smoother playing surfaces for longer through the year.

Links courses, or clubs that have sand based greens, may apply less, but nonetheless at rates that match the growth rate of the turf. Under such circumstances, these applications are often considered a smoothing operation rather than rootzone improvement.



Top dressing via a spinning disc (left) and by a rink dresser (right).

NOT JUST GREENS...

In order to improve the playing quality of other areas of the course out with greens, it is important top dressing be extended to green approaches, tees and fairway landing zones. This work improves the drainage of these areas and increases the firmness and consistency of the surfaces.

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