

Native Grasses, Pond Banks, and Upcoming Greens Aerification

Hello Men's Club,

Last article I went on the record saying Fall was coming early. That was a mostly incorrect prediction. While nighttime temperatures are trending lower, and the days are getting shorter (around 3 minutes per day), there is still enough daytime heat to keep us on our toes. As of today, it looks like we'll get another couple of weeks in the mid 70s before real fall settles in. Keep in mind I am not from Chicago, so I'm still getting used to the whole "first Fall and real Fall" thing.

This was certainly a big learning year for us. In the spring, we made a foolish assumption that all of our native areas and pond banks would not be filled with weeds, thus we did not treat them preventively. All of the soil turned over during construction brought up a massive amount of old weed seeds, and when they finally showed themselves early June, it was too late to treat preventively. This year, we cut all of our natives and pond banks down early, with the intention of selectively treating these areas for invasive and unsightly weeds. As much as I love a clean stand of fine fescue, I believe our place is best suited for a mix of wildflower, prairie grasses, and bunch type fescues that add both character and color. We'll treat these areas to preserve any desirable flowers or fescues, while eliminating invasive thistle, milkweed, amongst other harmful plants. In addition to removing undesirables, we will introduce new varieties of bunch type fescues such as switchgrass, indiagrass, big blue stem, amongst other varieties of native mixes and prairie grasses. The end goal here is to have a clean stand of fescues, with pockets of flowering plants that put on a cool show for the bulk of the golf season. The same goes for pond banks. A jagged, rugged look is preferred, however we prefer to achieve it using desirable, sightly plants.

Now onto a topic everyone loves to discuss; greens aerification. I understand everyone (except myself) hates it, but rest assured it will truly not be a huge deal for the ongoing future at WGC. When deciding which type of aerification is required on greens, you first need to start with a desired end goal. For us, considering our new greens, we want to increase firmness, encourage uniformity throughout the entire soil profile, and reduce organic buildup (thatch) to provide a firmer, faster putting surface. Based on that info, we decided to omit pulling cores for the ongoing future, instead opting to pack in more material to increase bulk density (firmness) over time. We will do this by topdressing at a very heavy rate with a coarser than normal sand, and punch it into the soil profile with an 8 inch deep x 3/8ths inch diameter solid tine. This practice allows us to add material into the rootzone, create channels for superior drainage, as well as encourages significant root development that helps us come next summer.

Once the bulk of the sand is punched in, the remainder is dragged in to fill any remaining voids, and rolled repeatedly to close the holes. The best part of this story is that the holes will be nearly 100% recovered within a week. This is the main advantage to not pulling a core, from the golfers perspective.

Enjoy the rest of the season while it lasts!

Evan

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