Compost Happens

by Scott Morrison, Golf Course Consultant

industry insight

One major tenet of "sustainability" often missing from most golf industry descriptions is the concept of becoming self-sufficient. Why is this an important concept? By rethinking our waste streams and beginning to source materials locally, or even from our own "wastes," we are reducing the environmental footprint of our operations. Furthermore, for island golf courses who find themselves surrounded by a "money moat," the cost (economically and environmentally) to import materials is significantly higher than a golf course within the mainland web of highways.

Perhaps the greatest opportunity accessible to most golf courses is composting of locally generated material. One course that has adopted composting practices as a means of managing wastes, improving aesthetics, reducing outward expenditures and creating the perfect size and consistency for use in turf is Gorge Vale Golf Club on Vancouver Island, BC, Canada. I've been lucky enough to have a tour of the property and decided to interview golf course superintendent Scott Wheeler for more info on his composting program.

Scott Morrison: "What goes into your compost pile?"
Scott Wheeler: "Pretty much anything that comes off the golf course during routine cleanup on a daily basis including leaves, divots, grass clippings, branches, etc. Leaf cleanup and core aeration obviously supplies large volumes of material. We also compost all our kitchen waste except meat/dairy products from the clubhouse. I might also add that we have a number of gardens on the course that generate material that is composted as well."

Scott Morrison: "Process of collecting materials? Do you use one central dump, or multiple ones that are eventually consolidated?"
Scott Wheeler: "Prior to my arrival at Gorge Vale, material was being dumped at a number of locations on the property with no plans for composting. Over a period of time we relocated all the material to a central yard where all material is now processed."

Scott Morrison: "How many 'active' piles of composting material do you maintain?"
Scott Wheeler: "We usually have three piles on the go. Staff dumps branches in a separate pile where they are chipped with our Vermeer chipper and added to the youngest pile. Piles are turned on a regular basis with a large front-end loader we have."

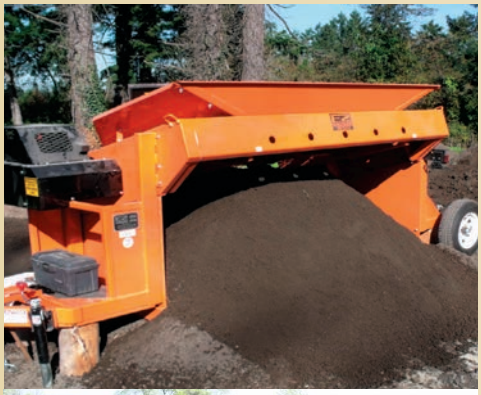
Scott Morrison: "Machinery used?"
Scott Wheeler: "The key piece is the EZ-Screen 550 Portable Screen I purchased and had shipped here from Minnesota (made in the USA). That piece will easily pay for itself in a couple seasons as soil out here on the island is expensive and also rather poor in quality. The unit has a small pull-start diesel engine on it and you can purchase different size screens."

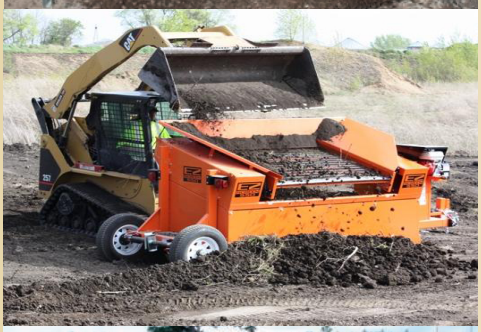
Scott Morrison: "Approximate man hours per season?"
Scott Wheeler: "It's an ongoing process that's part of our everyday routine so it's difficult to really put a number on it."

Scott Morrison: "I think that is one of the most important characteristics of any new activity, for it to be successful it must fit seamlessly in with your regular duties. Approximately how many cubic feet per year of end product?"
Scott Wheeler: "Approximately 14,000 cubic feet of material that we have accumulated over 12 months. Of that approximately one-third is fully composted and ready for use. It's incredible the volume of material we handle over 12 months."

Scott Morrison: "Where is the composted material used? Gardens? Turf?"
Scott Wheeler: "Gardens, construction projects, divot bottles, topdressing weak turf areas around green sites and other rough areas. We obviously do not use it on greens, but do blend the compost with sand for topdressing rough areas as mentioned and for construction projects. We also use it on the range to fill divots."

Scott Morrison: "How do you apply to turf areas?"
Scott Wheeler: "Applied with our ProPass top dresser and often the old fashion way... by hand."





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