

Green links

Nick Bayly looks at the measures being put into practice to meet the rising demand for eco-friendly courses

WHILE MANY GOLFERS believe their sport is environment-friendly, most courses require an enormous amount of water and often use large quantities of chemicals in order to keep the grass looking nice and green.

Following government legislation and increasing pressure from environmental groups to 'green up' their act, many golf clubs have now adopted environmental programmes that underpin almost everything done on and off the course.

These can include protecting the natural habitats of wildlife, using battery-powered buggies and ensuring that fertilizers used to treat the grass do as little harm to the natural habitat as possible.

Many initiatives stem from the Golf Environment Organisation (GEO), a not-for-profit group that is dedicated to offering practical advice to clubs to help them improve their sustainability. The GEO certifies clubs that adhere to its guidelines, helping suppliers and golfers know which ones

are taking positive steps to reduce their environmental impact.

Technology is at the forefront of this battle. Many mowers now run on biodiesel to reduce carbon emissions, while some new strains of grass more resistant to drought can even be watered with sea water.

With water set to become the new gold, golf course design might be entering an era where courses in large parts of the world become stripped to a bare minimum, much as they are in Arizona, where desert courses are reduced to tees, a strip of fairway and an island green in a sea of scrub and sand.

Golfers can do their bit by using biodegradable tees rather than plastic ones, walking with a trolley rather than using a fume-emitting petrol-powered buggy, and not getting upset with the course manager when the fairways turn brown in the summer (as they are supposed to do).

And, of course, holiday golfers can choose to play on eco-friendly courses or consider whether they need to travel halfway around the world to pursue their sport, when there's probably a perfectly nice course built on an old landfill site just down the road!

TOP 3 ECO COURSES

1. MACHRIHANISH DUNES, KINTYRE, SCOTLAND: It was built on a Site of Special Scientific Interest, with no chemicals, pesticides, heavy machinery or even artificial irrigation systems allowed on its 279 acres. Rare Hebridean sheep graze the fairways and out-of-bounds areas protect rare orchids.

www.machrihanishdunes.com

2. VINEYARD GOLF CLUB, MASSACHUSETTS, US: The only 100% organic golf club in the US has replaced traditional pesticides with bio-stimulants and composted fertilisers. Golfers who play this course will soon learn that the course doesn't need to look like a green carpet to offer great playability.

www.vineyardgolf.com

3. CHAMBERS BAY, WASHINGTON, US: The 2015 US Open venue was built on a former quarry. The course, opened in 2007, converts bio-solid waste from a nearby waste-treatment facility into fertiliser, while an irrigation system linked to a satellite-linked weather-monitoring system cuts water use by almost 20%. www.chambersbaygolf.com

