

botanic gardens

Building a state-of-the-art turfgrass training academy

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As part of our long-term commitment to training for the Irish turfgrass sector, Teagasc is developing a turfgrass training academy in the grounds of the Ashtown Food Research Centre. As part of the expansion of horticultural research and training on the Teagasc Ashtown site, an area of approximately one hectare was allocated to the new turf academy.

The new training academy comprises three golf holes, each measuring between 80m and 100m. Each hole has an elevated teeing complex, a green of approximately 200m² and two sand bunkers. The three greens were built to the most modern specification using a 10cm gravel raft with herringbone drainage and a 30cm root zone comprising sand and compost in an 80:20 ratio.

This design specification is similar to that introduced by the United States Golf Association in the 1960s. It has been refined many times over the years to produce a very high-performing playing surface. The construction provides a free-draining rootzone, a dry playing surface all year and a consistent ball roll.

Grass mixtures: A range of different grass mixes have been used. One green was sown with a Roundup-resistant fescue grass, the second with a combination of different fescue species and the third with a more traditional fescue/bent grass mixture. The remaining areas, including tee-boxes and fairways, were sown with a mixture of perennial rye grass, fescue and bentgrass.

The use of Roundup-resistant grasses is relatively new technology in sportsturf establishment. Apart from the control of broad-leaved weeds, being able to use the herbicide on our greens will enable us to maintain a pure stand of the fine-leaved red fescue throughout the life of the green and, in particular, it will provide us with an effective control for annual meadow grass (*Poa annua*) which is the most important weed grass on Irish golf greens.

Our choice of design specification, construction methods and grasses



reflects what is now the norm in modern golf course construction, where there is a strong emphasis on year-round play on high-performance playing surfaces.

As we have chosen to use high proportions of fescue on the various playing areas, we hope that we will be able to adapt a more sustainable approach to management, with a much lower reliance on fertilisers and pesticides. Seeding of the academy commenced in early June and grass establishment to date has been excellent. The final phase of the development is commencing shortly. This will include landscaping, tree

planting and the construction of the six sand bunkers on the site.

Dar Golf Construction will be coming on site shortly to construct the sand bunkers using the latest SportBond technology. In SportBond bunkers, the sand is placed directly on to a porous, bonded base. Water filters through the sand and into the SportBond layer where it is provided with the easiest path to the drainage pipes, eliminating sand wash, soil erosion and flooding.

The new Teagasc turfgrass training academy will be officially opened later this autumn in time for turfgrass training in the coming academic year.