

Quality is the first resort

Cypress Lakes, Hunter Valley

How do you maintain 360 acres of manicured grounds, including a luxury 18-hole golf course, in a region of extreme temperatures, limited water and inhospitable soil? You follow the lead of Cypress Lakes Resort.

Cypress Lakes is a golf and country club luxury resort nestled in the Pokolbin region of the NSW Hunter Valley. The resort covers 360 acres, of which 160 acres are devoted to the 18-hole, 6359 metre championship golf course. The remaining 200 acres comprise the resort's more than 200 villas, its own 12-acre vineyard, country club, health spa and guest facilities. The resort is named after the original Cypress Pines native to the area.

Maintaining both the golf course and the guest area grounds is a full time job for Merv Haywood and a staff of ten. Merv built the golf course and knows every blade of grass. The hurdles he faces in keeping its championship qualities, though, are much larger than those encountered by most course managers.

"Temperatures here can vary from 50°C in summer to -4°C in winter, plus we get big frosts," explains Merv. "Added to that, there is no natural top soil in the Valley, it's all low quality, red clay over shale. The grape vines love it, but keeping turf and gardens healthy is another matter. Water restrictions don't help things, either."

As the resort has both golf and guest areas with their different aesthetic or practical requirements, Merv's team has to treat them individually. What is suitable for one area, such as using a particular herbicide or type of turf, may not be suitable for another.

So faced with temperature extremes, poor soil and diverse area requirements, how do Merv and his staff keep the resort in tip-top condition? "We plan the entire year's program and I rely on good products," he says. "I would describe Scotts products as quality, reliable and state-of-the-art with their coatings."



Use quality to keep quality

Native trees and grasses are used throughout the resort – exotics would never survive.

The fairway grasses are mainly Couch, with Pencross Bent on the greens. In winter, Merv uses Rye Grass - Scotts Caravelle – as an over-sow for the Couch, and is happy to leave it in over the summer. Hard wearing Buffalo and Fescue are used around the swimming pool and convention centre. You'll find Kikuyu around the health spa facilities and other more prominent parts.

Scotts slow release fertilisers, predominantly Sierrablen, are used as the staple nutrient supply for all grasses. "Sierrablen provides an even feed over time," says Merv. "That means I don't get the grass growing in peaks. With quickly accessible fertilisers, you're often just throwing on straight nitrogen. The grass peaks, then quickly loses quality. You need a bit of feed slowly." For the same reasons, Sportsmaster with Iron is also used on the fairways.

One of the other benefits of using Scotts slow release fertilisers on the shallow, red clay soil is there is minimal run-off. In conjunction, Scotts Granular Hydraflo is the wetting agent that suits the resort's hydrophobic soils and irrigation program. Merv believes it's better to saturate once a week than water a bit every night.

Due to the consistent growth of the greens and fairways, regular attention is required. Greens are mown every day, the courses three times a week, sometimes four times in summer.

Weed control is handled in a number of ways, depending on the location. Dicot III, a combination granular herbicide with fertiliser, is used on lawns around the clubhouse and other public areas. "It takes out broadleaf weeds, and because it is granular you only need protective clothing and a disposable mask. People see you and they aren't concerned, which is important for these public areas."

In other areas, Premax is the pre-emergent herbicide – it creates a barrier at the soil surface to stop grassy weeds – and TGR is used to suppress winter weeds.

"With Scotts, you pay a bit extra for the technology," says Merv, "but with the slow release of the fertilisers over time, when you add up your reduced labour costs, it brings you back into the dollar range."

The old problem of water

The Hunter Valley region in typical years would record over 810mm of rain a year. It has been seven years since those levels were seen.

This year so far only around 375mm have fallen. The resort has responded by ensuring that all water used for maintaining the grounds is recycled. Run-off from the fairways flows into the creeks, which in turn runs into holding dams.

The dams hold a combined total of 180 megalitres. The main dam was the original limestone quarry for Cessnock. A further 150 megalitres a year are purchased via a line from the Hawkesbury River.

Being seen to be safe when using herbicides in public areas

For reasons of perception, it is not advisable to spray herbicides where and when people are using public areas. Apply a granular herbicide instead, using a spreader to minimise drift. This method adheres to OH&S requirements, as there is little protective clothing required, and offers passers-by the feeling that the herbicide, if in fact they recognise what is being done, is safe for them.

Scotts Dicot III is a 3-way, broad-spectrum herbicide combined with a slow release fertiliser suitable for use in controlling broadleaf weeds in warm season grasses. Perfect for schools and public areas.

The resort also uses 'black water': sewage from the accommodation, club and spa facilities. The joke among the grounds staff is they encourage guests to use a full flush so more water is available for the greens.

"We run our grounds maintenance program with the environment firmly in mind," says Merv. "We even mulch dying trees.

"It's a dry and arid area with no soil - it's all done with TLC."

There is also an air of mystery surrounding the Cypress Lakes course. Along the 11th fairway is a place few golfers would like to retrieve a ball – the Brokenwood graveyard. If you do happen to hit your ball in among the ageing headstones, there is a local custom that says...

You'd best visit Cypress Lakes Resort to find out.

