

Thanks to Art Keller....

Why It's Important to Repair Your Ball Marks on the Green



During a tournament on the Champions Tour, Mark Johnson (center), Morris Hatalsky (left) and Ben Crenshaw take time to repair their ball marks. If they can do it, so can you.

Dave Martin / Getty Images

Ball marks - also called pitch marks - are the bane of smooth-putting and healthy greens on golf courses all over the world. They're the little depressions, or craters, sometimes made when a golf ball descends from the sky and impacts the putting surface.

Repairing those little depressions is very important. Equally important is doing it the right way. Because while many golfers fail to repair ball marks - and shame on you if you are one of them - there are also many well-meaning golfers who do "repair" the pitch marks, only to do so incorrectly.

A ball mark can cause the grass in the depression to die, leaving not just a scar but also a pit in the putting surface that can knock well-struck putts offline. Repairing a ball mark restores a smooth surface and helps keep the grass healthy.

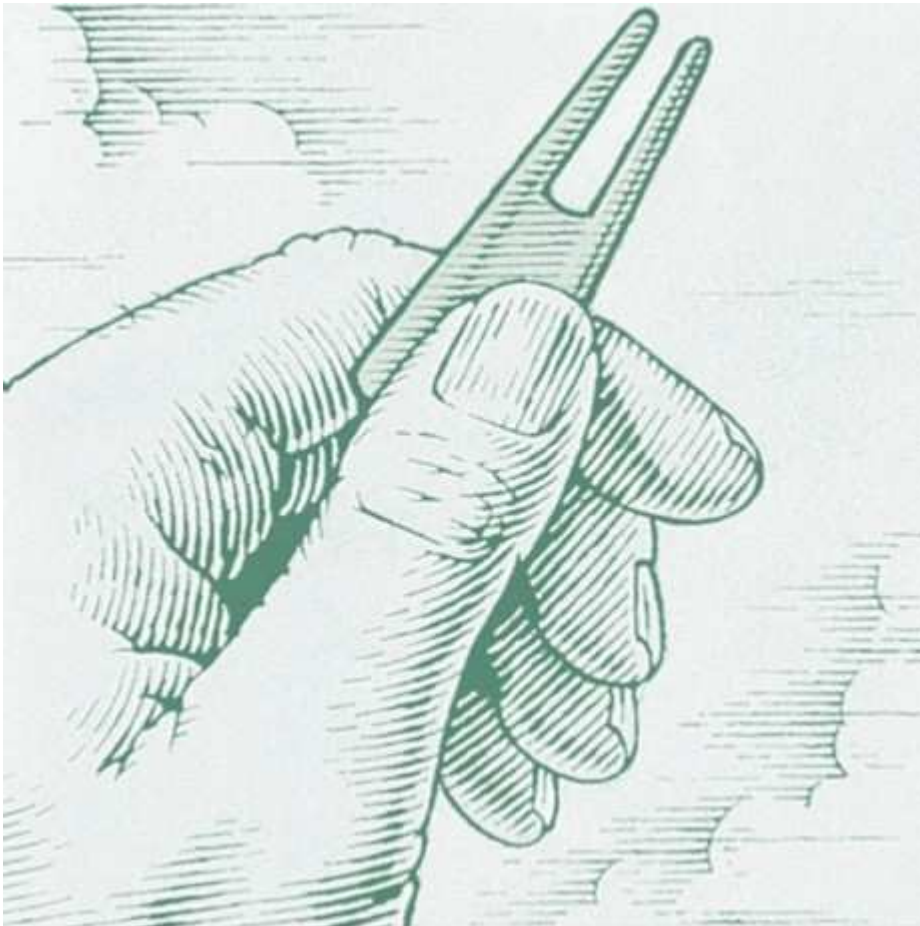
But "repairing" a ball mark incorrectly can actually cause more damage than not attempting to repair it at all, according to a study done at Kansas State University. The KSU researchers, whose conclusions were reported on Cybergolf.com, found that incorrectly "repaired" ball marks take up

to twice as long to heal as those that are properly repaired. So golfers, let's all start fixing our ball marks, and doing it the right way.

And if you have a moment - if there isn't another group of golfers behind you waiting for you to clear the green - fix one or two other ball marks, too, if you find more of them on the green. Repairing ball marks isn't just important for the health of the greens, and for smooth-rolling putts. It isn't just a matter of etiquette. It is our obligation to help take care of the golf courses we play. And repairing ball marks is a big part of that obligation to the game.

On the next few pages are illustrations courtesy of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America and text explaining the right way to fix ball marks.

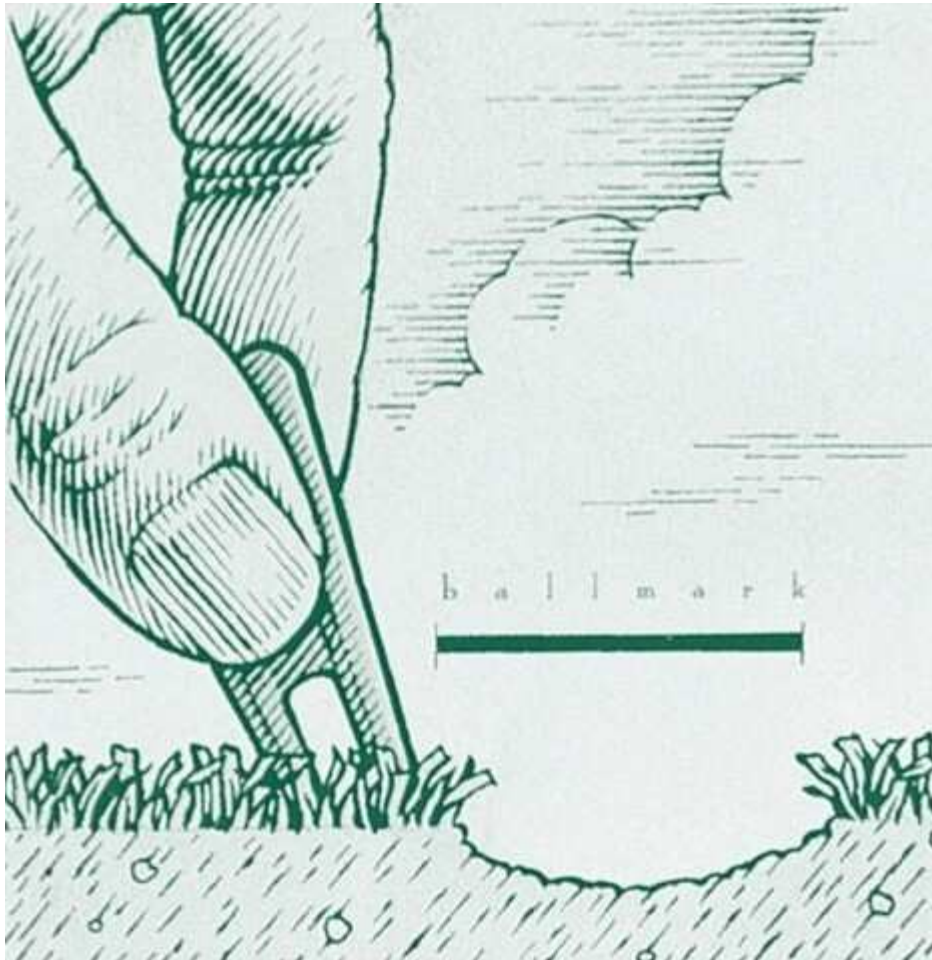
Ball Mark Repair Tool



The ball mark repair tool is the right tool for the job of repairing ball marks. The tool should be familiar to every golfer; it's a simple tool, just two prongs on the end of a piece of metal or hard plastic. There are some newfangled ball mark repair tools on the market, but the jury is still out on whether any of them really do a better job at helping greens heal than the standard, old-fashioned tool pictured above.

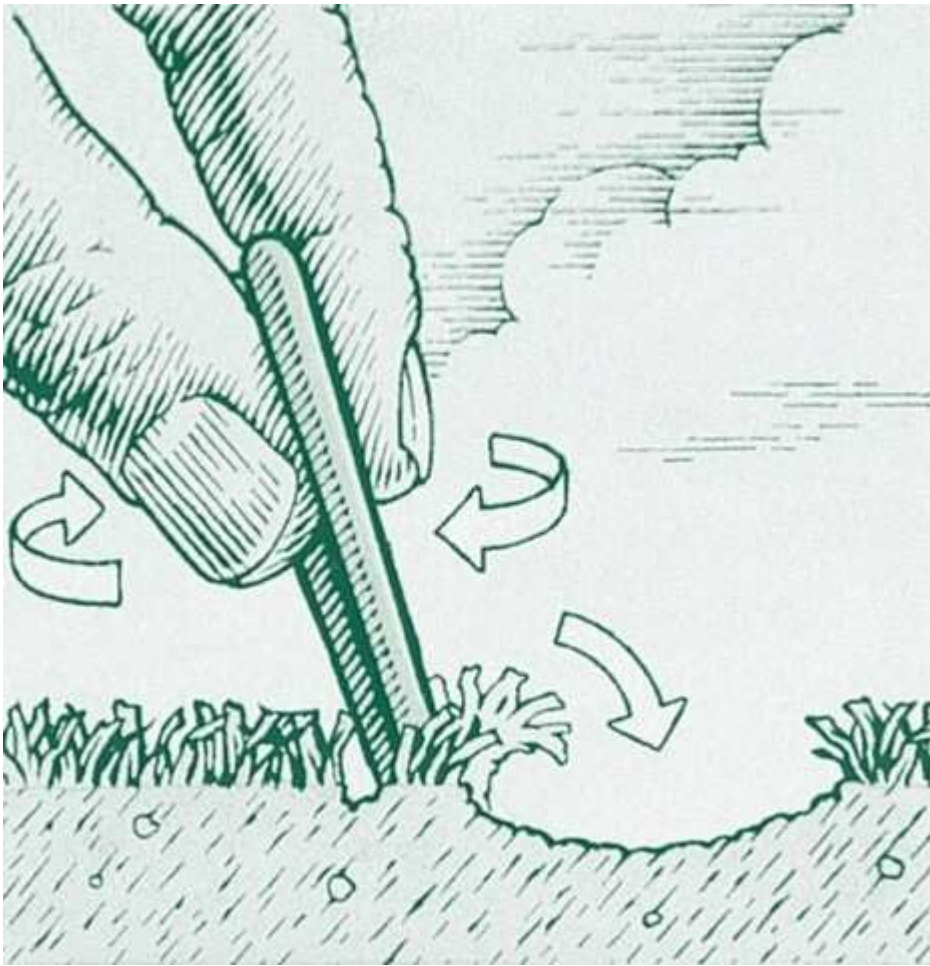
By the way, you'll sometimes see this tool referred to as a "divot repair tool." It's not used for repairing divots, of course, so that name is inappropriate. But if you do see that term, this is almost certainly the tool to which it is referring. The ball mark repair tool is an essential piece of equipment that every golfer should have in his or her golf bag.

Insert the Ball Mark Repair Tool



The first step in repairing ball marks is to take your ball mark repair tool and insert the prongs into the turf at the edge of the depression. Note: Do NOT insert the prongs into the depression itself, but at the rim of the depression.

Push Edges of the Ball Mark Toward the Center



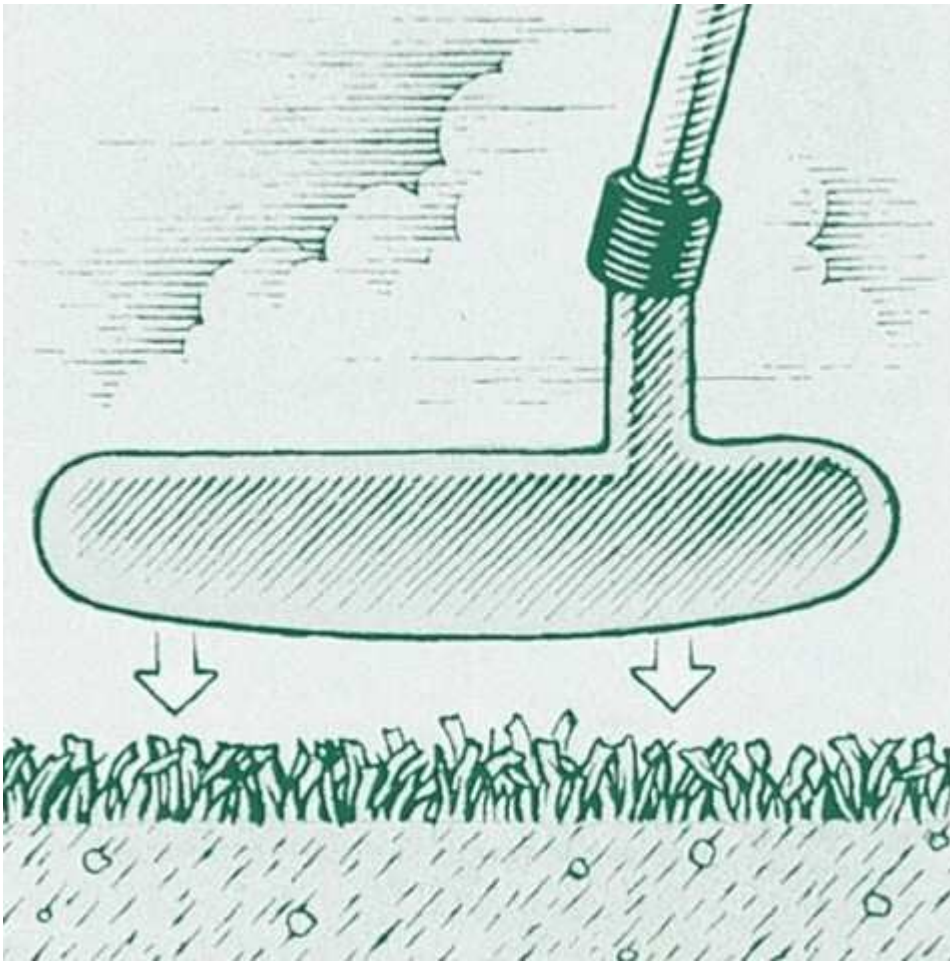
The next step is to push the edge of the ball mark toward the center, using your ball mark repair tool in a "gentle twisting motion," in the words of the GCSAA. This is the step where golfers who incorrectly "repair" ball marks usually mess up. Many golfers believe the way to "fix" a ball mark is to insert the tool at an angle, so the prongs are beneath the center of the crater, and then to use the tool as a lever to push the bottom of the ball mark back up even with the surface. Do not do this! Pushing the bottom of the depression upward only tears the roots, and kills the grass.

So remember:

Wrong: Using the prongs as levers to push up the bottom of the depression.

Right: Using the prongs to push grass at the edge of the depression toward the center. Just use your ball mark repair tool to work around the rim of the crater, so to speak, pushing the grass at the edge toward the center of the depression. One way to envision this is to picture reaching down with your thumb and forefinger on opposite sides of the ball mark and "pinching" those sides together.

Smooth Over and Admire Your Work



Once you've worked around the rim of the ball mark with your repair tool, pushing the grass toward the center, there's only one thing left to do: Gently tamp down the repaired ball mark with your putter or foot to smooth the putting surface. Then admire your work and pat yourself on the back for helping to take care of the golf course.