

USGA Report

Counting Down The Days

By John H. Foy



For golf courses throughout Central and South Florida, a basic management objective during the initial part of the winter season is to survive until mid-February and then to the first of March. Once we get past Valentine's Day, along with a steady increase in day

length, the potential for cold fronts making their way down the peninsula becomes progressively less. As nighttime temperatures climb back into the high 50-60-degree range, the base bermudagrass begins to wake up, and it is possible to produce a degree of recovery from "golfer blight."

As discussed by Todd Lowe, USGA Agronomist covering Florida's west coast, in an ear-

lier regional update, all courses suffer from "golfer blight" because peak play occurs when bermudagrass growth has essentially come to a stop. Significantly increased evidence of ball-mark damage on putting surfaces, tight fairway lies, and a loss of definition between the fairway and rough cuts because the turf has become beat down by moderate to heavy cart traffic are all signs of "golfer blight."

Further complicating matters this winter was the very active hurricane season, which resulted in a six- to eight-week setback in accomplishing routine management programs and fall preparations. There have been a few S-O-S calls, but for the most part everyone survived the first part of the winter play season in acceptable condition. Superintendents are counting down the days until the winter play officially comes to an end so that they can begin growing grass again.

For the interim, continue to aggressively manage cart traffic and aerate high traffic areas followed by an application of 0.25 to 0.5 lbs of actual nitrogen per 1,000 sq. ft. from a readily available source. This will minimize further deterioration and help initiate the recovery process. While it can be a real challenge to get any work accomplished with peak winter season play, supplemental non-disruptive

aeration of putting surface is strongly encouraged.

Water injection cultivation or aeration with small-diameter solid tines or star tines does not affect surface smoothness, and is very beneficial to maintain good moisture and oxygen infiltration into the upper rootzones of the greens. The very dense canopy of the ultradwarf bermudagrasses, as well as the normal buildup of compaction, can severely restrict infiltration. Periodic supplemental non-disruptive aeration treatments need to be preformed through the winter, and it will be very important to closely monitor all turf areas for the rapid onset of drought stress.

Based on visits to courses throughout the state, cleanup and recovery from the hurricanes is 80 to 90 percent complete. Debris piles in out-of-play areas are still common, and plans are in place at many courses to begin bunker sand refurbishment or removal and replacement of contaminated material. Another common finding is a continuing loss of pine trees. With the onset of hot weather, tree loss will likely increase due to environmental stresses or outbreaks of pine bark beetles that are attracted to damaged trees. Unfortunately, we will continue to be plagued by the lingering effects of last year's very active hurricane season for quite some time.

Plants of the Year

The Florida Nursery Growers and Lawn Care Association (FNGLA) is proud to announce the 2005 Plants of the Year. The plants selected for this program have been found to be good performers in the Florida environment and require less maintenance and inputs. Here are two flowering shrubs for your consideration.



Common name: Princess Flower
Botanical name: *Tibouchina urvilleana*
Hardiness: Zones 8b-11
Mature height and spread: 5-8 ft
Classification: Large flowering shrub in South and Central Florida, Perennial in North Florida
Landscape use: Flowering shrub for informal hedge or mixed border used as an accent or in masses
Characteristics: The silver-green foliage on the Princess Flower shows off 5-petaled purple flowers that open 3-4 inches across from red-tinged buds through the warm season.



Common name: Yellow Elder
Botanical name: *Tecoma stans*
Hardiness: Zones 8-11
Mature height and spread: Can be kept 5-10 ft. tall by 4-6 ft wide
Classification: Large flowering shrub
Landscape use: Specimen for long-lasting blooms
Characteristics: The Yellow Elder's light green compound pinnate leaves are complete with large yellow bell-shaped flowers at growing tips. It blooms almost constantly during warm weather and is a hummingbird attractor. This shrub may die to the ground in North Florida, but emerges in the spring. A type called 'Gold Star' has been found to be a very reliable, free-flowering small shrub with a mass of golden-yellow flowers through much of the year.