

Continued from page 5 "protecting Turf from Winter Injury"

Remove Excess Thatch

Thick thatch layers tend to dry out quickly and serve as a harboring place for snow mold fungi. Winter disease and desiccation damage will be reduced if coring or thatch removal is practiced during the year. Late fall aeration may lead to desiccation around the coring holds during winters when there is not snow cover.

Traffic Control

The brittle tissues of frozen turf during the winter are prone to injury by traffic. The most severe damage seems to occur when bare or slush-covered ground exists. Snow (especially dry snow) acts like an insulator, protecting the turf below from traffic and direct low temperature injury.

Disease Prevention

Two of the most common and destructive low-temperature fungi are the two snow molds, pink and gray. Like Typhula blight (gray), pink snow mold can occur under snow, or is often observed in the absence of snow cover during cool (less than 50 degrees F), wet weather in fall, winter or spring. Gray snow mold is common in northern regions that receive more than 90 days of snow cover. It is particularly severe when snow covers partially or completely unfrozen ground.

A combination of fungicides and cultural practices is needed to provide acceptable levels of control in locations where disease pressure is high. Cultural practices that improve drainage, reduce thatch and maintain a balance fertility program (moderate nitrogen levels) help reduce both diseases. In general, contact-type fungicides are used for the prevention of gray snow mold and should be applied within a few days of snowfall.

Protective Blankets, Topdressing or Straw

Protection from low temperature injury, earlier spring green-up, and reduced desiccation are just a few of the benefits synthetic covers, topdressing, straw or the selective placement of snow fences can provide. Geotextile covers are also used to protect young seedlings and speed up germination or regrowth between hash marks and around the goal mouths of soccer fields.

Unfortunately, winter covers are not a panacea and will not solve all winter problems, including ice-related damage and crown hydration injury. Unless treated, cool-weather diseases are also more damaging under covers.

Summary

A better understanding, innovative ideas, genetic breakthroughs and even small miracles might be necessary to eliminate all forms of winter injury. However, using today's "best management practices" that promote rapid soil drainage and encourage healthy, winter-hardened turf going into winter is a grounds manager's best line of defense. ▲

John Roberts is an extension turf specialist at the University of New Hampshire.

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"Are you Putting your Field to Bed or Putting it Out to Pasture?"

by Dave Minner and Gary Peterson, Extension Turfgrass Specialist, Iowa State University

If you are putting your field to bed this fall and tucking it in nicely with some love and care than you can expect it to wake up next spring ready to go and ahead of the game. If you are darn glad the fall season is over and you don't want to see that field until next year, then expect it to look like a pasture because you are treating it like one. If you plan to use the field in early spring or summer than it will be in the same condition that you left it at the end of the autumn. Instead, trying to do all of the coring, seeding, and field preparation in the spring may leave too much to chance with wet or cold weather. Get a jump on next year by putting your field to bed so it will wake up ready to go. Here are a few end-of-the-season tips that will help you prepare your baseball/softball fields for next year.

Baseball/softball

The fall practice schedule for baseball and softball is usually *Continue on page 9.....*

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not as demanding on the field as the spring game schedule. However, it is important to remember that the field condition entering the winter will be the same as the field condition during the start of the baseball/softball season, especially for college fields. College baseball/softball can start as early as February 15 and if the weather is nice they will be on the field. The spring schedule for high school usually starts later in the spring since the high school season continues in the summer after classes have ended.

- Skin areas are often left to fend for themselves during the winter. Strong winds can blow the infield dirt materials into the adjacent grass areas and cause large lips to build up during the winter. Boards or silt fence have been used to reduce blowing dirt. Another simple method described by Luke Yoder, Pittsburg Pirates, is to lay down 2-by-4 boards along the dirt infield and adjacent to the grass where the lip usually starts to form. Lay the boards flat and stake them if needed. The dirt piles up on the boards and is easily removed in the spring.
- Some high schools disk the skin area and leave it rough all winter. This works fine if you don't need the field until late spring. If you disk the skin area in the fall and need to have the field ready for play in March, you could have a problem. The worked-up infield will hold water and it may be impossible to drag and firm the surface until the surface has dried.
- Mound and batter box areas should be reconditioned in the fall and then covered with a tarp for the winter. Pull the tarp off in the spring and you are ready to go.
- Sod worn areas in front of the mound and at first and third so they will be ready in the spring.
- Avoid using non-selective soil sterilant herbicides on skin areas to prevent weed growth in skin areas. It is likely that these materials will field their way into the surrounding turf areas and cause injury.

The most important part of your fall program is to have a plan. Don't just drop the field after the last fall game and then try to get ready for next year in the middle of the summer. Autumn is the best time to prepare the field for the rest of the year and be sure that you implement your "putting the field to bed program" immediately after your last fall game. ▲



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"Getting Equipment Ready to go"

by Gilbert Pena, Marketing Manager, Commercial Mowing, John Deere Turf Care & Steve and Suz Trusty, Trusty & Associates

While many of us will put our mowing equipment to bed for the winter, others will continue in the snow removal season. As you finish storing mowing equipment, go ahead and get snow removal equipment ready to go for that first surprise storm.

A pre-season service for two-cycle machines should start with fresh fuel and oil. To prevent the engine from running hot, make sure to have a proper fuel/oil ratio mix. For models that don't require a fuel/oil mixture, add fresh fuel. Each model's operator's manual will have the exact measurements.

Check the belts on the drive mechanism to ensure that they still move freely and haven't hardened. If the belts have hardened, they're more likely to break during a job, leaving your customer with downtime.

Don't forget to lubricate, adjust and inspect all moving parts and safety devices before the first use of the season. Safety shields and guards should be in good shape and fastened in place.

To minimize chute clogging, try spraying slip-plate lubricant onto the surface of the chute.

For walk-behind snow removal equipment, make sure that the operator presence system is engaged.

Don't forget about safety. Take the opportunity to remind all operators of important safety precautions. Shop safety posters, for example, are an ideal way to inform your employees and customers about safe operating habits. Those practices include blowing snow away from people, parked cars and buildings; never putting hands in the discharge chute to unclog snow or debris and wearing protective eyewear and clothing. Again, since all models have specific safety features, refer to your operator's manuals for important seasonal safety tips.

Tackling the Equipment

Once the turf preparations for winter have been completed, it's time to concentrate on preparing the equipment. At the end of the mowing season, one of the worst things you can do to a mower of handheld product is to simply "put it up" until the next season. Proper store affects its useful life and reliability.

First and foremost, prepare eh fuel system for storage.

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