



## Using Synthetic Practice Tees For Winter Play

March 2014

A few years ago, our golf course installed a synthetic tee at the back of the practice facility so that golfers could use it throughout the winter months. Playability from the synthetic surface is actually better than most of us anticipated, but with temperatures beginning to warm, we would prefer to play from the “real” tee. Any reason why we shouldn’t be allowed to tee it up on the turf during warm days?



Understandably, warmer weather generates more opportunities to practice, but, keep in mind, the turf is not actually growing even if it is green. Whereas air temperatures may warm to comfortable levels for a few hours on any given day to enjoy golf and melt frost, soil temperatures are still too cool to generate active turf growth. If the turf is not actively growing, it has little traffic tolerance and no ability to recover from divots. Any divots or wear areas created now will persist for months and likely not fill in until early summer for cool-season turfgrasses and mid-summer for warm-season species. Keep in mind that as soils freeze and thaw throughout the winter and spring, golf course playing areas are more vulnerable to soil compaction. This eventually requires additional aeration later in the growing season to correct the problem. Furthermore, when turf is dormant and off-color, winter play slows its spring greenup and reduces turf vigor. This condition will persist into the golfing season and oftentimes results in more fertilizer and pesticides being needed during the growing season to improve weakened turf.

Winter play generates many questions each year for the Green Section staff, and there are very real risks involved for the turf and your golf course. Sometimes consequences are immediately noticeable, and sometimes they are not realized until later in the year. At any rate, it was a wise decision to install synthetic turf to allow for winter play, and it is just as wise to use it while the “real” turf is resting.

### Useful Resources:

[Playing Par with Jack Frost](#)

[Politics, Religion and Winter Play on Greens](#)