



*Poa annua* is highly susceptible to injury from cycles of thawing and freezing. Areas where water from melting snow collects and refreezes need to be closely monitored.

## FINDING THE RIGHT FAIRWAY HEIGHT

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When we play different golf courses, we often notice differences in fairway lies. Some courses seem to have shorter fairway turf while others seem to have more grass under the ball. USGA agronomists often get asked what is the best fairway mowing height and the simple answer is that one-size-fits-all does not apply.

The optimal fairway height for any given course depends on a variety of factors. First, superintendents must consider the grass species being grown. Certain grasses perform better at higher mowing heights while others perform better and provide better playability at lower heights. Soil conditions, drainage, thatch management, shade, cart traffic, use of plant growth regulators and available mowing equipment also play important roles in determining the appropriate mowing height for fairways.

In general, the goal is to provide golfers with a clean lie in the fairway, so that the ball sits up with little grass between it and the clubhead. A clean lie allows the clubhead to impact the ball before the turf, thereby allowing the golfer to impart more spin and gain greater control of the shot. Skilled golfers often

prefer very low fairway mowing heights because they consistently strike the ball cleanly. However, golfers who sweep the ball as opposed to hitting down on it may prefer fluffier lies. They may not care as much if there are a few grass blades between the clubhead and the ball if they can make consistent contact because it is sitting up a little higher.

Tight lies occur when the fairway is firm and has little cushioning underneath the turf. Hitting behind the ball rarely produces a good result, but hitting a shot fat from a tight lie produces especially poor results. Hitting a little behind the ball from a fluffy lie won't allow for much spin, but the extra grass under the ball is more forgiving.

If this discussion has you thinking that you'd prefer higher-cut fairways with fluffy lies, be careful what you wish for. Golf balls might bounce and roll a little less on fairways mowed at higher heights, so the course could play longer. Golf balls also tend to nestle down into higher-cut turf, which makes achieving clean contact difficult. This means that distance could be reduced and less spin is imparted on the ball. Mowing fairways significantly higher could actually make the course more difficult for golfers of all swing types and abilities.

In general, fairway heights in the range of 0.350-0.500 inch will serve most golf courses well. However, as previously mentioned, many factors must be evaluated to determine the best option for each individual golf course. Optimal mowing heights could be slightly lower or higher than this range depending on the fairway grass and other factors specific to the golf course you are playing.