Spring Green

By Bud White, regional director, Mid-Continent Region

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Spring is a time when golf course superintendents set up their season fertilization programs and try to get the turf to 'wake up' and respond. Golfers are impatient in the spring after being cooped up all winter and are ready to tee it up. They also are expecting mid-season turf conditions and have a hard time understanding why tees and fairways are thin. Bermudagrass fairways require a period of warm days and nights before color returns, further annoying many golfers. But remember - a clean and uniform dormant fairway is an excellent playing surface.

Superintendents must resist the urge to push tees and fairways too early as significant nitrogen applications in early spring will only produce over stimulation of leaves at the expense of the root system. March applications of nitrogen are not the same as dormant feeding (December, early January) and care must be taken to not interchange them. Dormant feeding promotes a deep rooted plant, not top growth. This long time practice provides available nutrients in the soil solution as soon as conditions allow for turf growth activity, giving a jump start as soon as soil temperatures allow for growth. Dormant bermudagrass responds especially well to iron and magnesium applications, made as a spray, in mid-February to mid-March to promote color.

Explaining this science of turf management to golfers in the winter is a successful approach in helping them understand why turf is not in mid-season condition as soon as the spring weather pops. Waiting until spring to explain this process leaves them frustrated and disappointed.

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Information on the USGA's Course Consulting Service

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