



Holes From Hell

By Bob Vavrek, agronomist, Central Region

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Golfers' expectations may change over time, but one constant is their universal disdain for holes in the putting surface caused by hollow tine core cultivation. The grouching over this temporary annoyance has forced many superintendents to postpone core cultivation until play subsides during late fall.

Better late than never may be an appropriate saying when paying taxes, but not so appropriate when greens are cored during late October/early November. It makes good sense to core early enough during fall to provide ample time for the holes to completely heal over by winter. Partially closed holes can make the greens more susceptible to desiccation during a harsh, open winter. More importantly, holes that are open going into winter may not recover until late spring or early summer when warm weather decides to continue hibernation until June.

Many courses that counted on warm spring weather to accelerate hole recovery were more than a little disappointed this season. Cool days, cold nights and frequent hard frosts were responsible for unusually low soil temperatures across the upper Midwest during April and May. As a result, open holes in greens were a common sight right through June.

Open holes are always an annoyance to players, but more so during spring when they are especially eager to start the golf season. Completely filling the holes with sand then rolling the greens will reduce the amount of surface disruption and prolong the beneficial effects of cultivation. However, there is no substitute for favorable soil temperatures when it comes to encouraging turf growth during spring and fall.

The first week of September is the upper Midwest's traditional time to cultivate greens for a good reason, soil temperatures are high and the surfaces heal quickly and completely before the first few hard frosts and short day length inhibits the top growth. Hopefully the *holes from hell* seen on many greens this spring will encourage more courses to reconsider their questionable policy of postponing cultivation until the last possible minute before snowfall.

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