



Au Contraire, Mon Frere

By Bob Vavrek, agronomist, Central Region

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It's only natural to hope for an early Christmas present this season. After all, courses across the north central tier of states barely experienced summer weather until September and then an exceptionally cool, wet October pretty much put the kibosh on any hopes of recovering long lost golf revenues before winter.

To make matters worse, early arrival of frigid December temperatures and heavy snow provided little time to initiate, let alone complete, late season renovation projects. It's hard to imagine a silver lining associated with this season's weather when you are plowing snow in a blizzard all night prior to the official start of winter. Hoping for some good to be gained from a cold start to the winter, several superintendents have raised the following question. Will the single digit temperatures of mid-December cause extra stress and mortality to overwintering insect pests, such as grubs, sod webworms, ants and billbugs?

The answer... not likely. Contrary to popular belief, most insect pests of cool season turf have difficulty surviving a mild winter when temperatures fluctuate widely and are quite well adapted to surviving in a state of suspended animation throughout a long, cold winter. For example, grubs may expend so much energy moving up and down the soil profile in response to changing soil temperatures during a mild winter that they enter spring in a weakened condition. A weak grub may not survive an early spring cold snap. In contrast, cold early winter temperatures followed by sustained snow cover may be just what the doctor ordered for grubs to experience a comfy winter diapause and then enter spring happy and hungry for some tasty turf roots.

Sorry, but no early holiday presents with respect to free insect pest control this season, but here's wishing all of you and yours happy holidays and a safe and happy New Year.

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