



## Don't Procrastinate—Irrigate

By Bob Vavrek, agronomist, Central Region

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It won't be long before all speculation comes to an end about winter injury. No doubt, there will be winterkill to *Poa annua* somewhere across the upper Midwest. The only questions are "where" and "how severe?"

Philosophies about the most effective programs for accelerating recovery can vary significantly from course to course. Covers or no covers? Sod or seed? Verticut or aerate to prepare a seedbed? Do it all and torpedo the budget by June, or do nothing and let Mother Nature take her course? After all, an old *Poaannua* surface is resilient to the point where recovery will eventually occur, regardless of what we do or don't do.

However, a stagnant golf economy dictates that we make every effort to provide golfers a playable surface as soon as possible after a bout of winterkill. Springtime green fees provide extremely important early season cash flow, and a new member who joins a club during April will pay dues the rest of the season. Nothing elicits the response of: "I will play or join somewhere else" quite like the sight of dead greens and fairways and injury that persists through Memorial Day weekend.

There is a basic, simple management practice necessary to facilitate turf



***Winter injury will be seen somewhere across the North Central Region this spring. Providing ample irrigation to the turf is an essential, but often overlooked, aspect of the recovery process. Initiate irrigation across damaged turf as early as possible to limit further injury from desiccation and to accelerate the rate of recovery from inter-seeding operations.***

recovery that is often overlooked when a course is affected by winter injury: early irrigation. Courses that fire up the irrigation systems early tend to recover faster than courses that do not, unless, of course, we experience an unusually wet spring.

Perhaps it's the pride of winning the annual "I was the last person in the city to water my fairways" derby. Maybe it's the springtime "I'm going to train my *Poa* roots to look for water deep in the soil" philosophy. For whatever reasons, most superintendents across the upper Midwest have an aversion to watering the golf course during May.

Granted, *April showers* and mild temperatures we typically experience during spring provide adequate growing conditions for "healthy" turf without supplemental irrigation. The game changes when we consider turf that is dead or severely injured by winter stress. In fact, limiting irrigation can be the final nail in the coffin for weak turf that is teetering on the edge of survival coming out of the winter. It will always be cheaper and easier to nurse the existing grass that "almost" dies back to health during April and May versus sodding or trying to establish new turf from seed in a dead playing surface. Consequently, never pronounce turf dead from winter injury until the affected site gets a good drink of water from rainfall or irrigation.

Until next month, here's hoping your April showers need to do little more than bring May flowers.

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