



Courses Generally Emerging From Winter In Good Condition

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Golf courses throughout the upper Mid-Continent region are transitioning out of winter dormancy, and most cool-season playing surfaces have been mowed at least once. Early indicators of turf health are mostly positive; there does not appear to be nearly as much winterkill as in recent years.

Of course, March and April are known to have large temperature swings, plenty of rain, and occasionally snow. As turfgrasses come out of dormancy they lose much of their winter hardiness, which means they are very susceptible to damage if severe cold snaps occur, as they often do in March and April. Crown hydration injury (a type of winterkill injury to turf) is still a real risk wherever water pools and freezes at the surface. As with extremes of any kind, *Poa annua* is especially vulnerable to damage, whereas creeping bentgrass and Kentucky bluegrass are much more resilient.



Varying rates of spring green-up for different bentgrass varieties are evident on a tee at a Chicagoland course.

It's understandable that the golfing community is chomping at the bit to tee it up as soon as turf begins shifting from brown to green. Green colored turf, however, does not signify that active growth has begun. Rather, there are still several weeks before soil temperatures warm into the sixties. Until then, there is little or no turf recuperative potential, which leaves it unable to recover from daily traffic. This is why even a few rounds of golf can be damaging during the winter and early spring. Mostly, however, it is important to understand that courses are in their most vulnerable state during these transition periods, especially if soils

are saturated and soft. Play and traffic during wet soil conditions at this time of year may result in:

- Soil compaction that will require additional aeration to correct.
- Shearing action across the roots, rhizomes, and growing points of the plant, which is comparable to cutting the roots by using a sod cutter. Root damage at this critical juncture can lead to long-term turfgrass health problems and jeopardize course conditions throughout the golfing season.
- Increased fertilizer demands to promote recovery of damaged turf.
- Voids in the turf canopy since the turf is not yet actively growing. This creates opportunity for actively-growing weeds, such as *Poa annua*.
- Slower spring green-up and reduced turf vigor that persists into the golfing season.

If excellent conditioning during the peak season of play is of any importance, then exercising caution now should take precedence. Rely on your superintendent and knowledgeable course officials to determine an appropriate opening date and if your course is playable each day.

Special Announcement: Beginning this year, the GCSAA will now award education points for Turfgrass Advisory Service (TAS) visits. Golf course superintendents and assistants that subscribe and participate in a USGA TAS visit at their golf course will earn 0.3 points for ½-day visits and 0.6 for full-day visits.

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