



Temporary greens established in approaches are an effective insurance policy against damage to putting greens during winter play.

PROVEN PUTTING GREEN PROTECTION

BY ZACH NICOLUDIS | AGRONOMIST, CENTRAL REGION

Recent temperature swings of 30 to 40 degrees have many superintendents questioning what winter's impact will be on putting green health. Attention is usually focused on how single-digit temperatures and prolonged ice cover can cause winter injury, but the risk of injury is compounded when winter play is permitted on putting greens during a brief reprieve from subfreezing temperatures.

Putting quality during winter can never approach the conditions golfers experience in the summer, and it only takes footprints from a few foursomes before putting quality diminishes further. Golfers at one course recently requested the putting greens be rolled to smooth out winter footprints. However, rolling partially thawed putting surfaces can lead to turf health problems.

If only the top few inches of the soil are thawed and rolling is performed, pressure from the roller can cause the thawed portion of the soil profile to slide like a throw rug on a hardwood floor. Roots will be severely

damaged if this situation occurs. The injury will not be visible while turf is dormant, but beginning a new season with a compromised root system is not desirable.

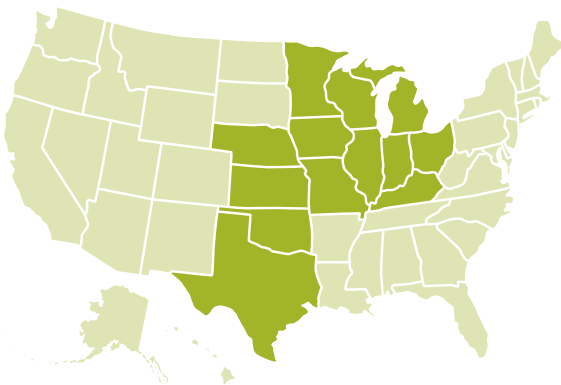
Establishing temporary greens in approaches during late fall eliminates the need to worry about winter foot traffic or the pressure to perform potentially damaging maintenance practices on putting surfaces. This strategy provides the best opportunity to avoid damage from winter traffic while still allowing golfers to play a round during a break from the cold and snow.

If excessive footprinting does occur during winter play, rolling should not be performed until the ground is completely thawed and firm. It is not worth sacrificing turf health during the primary playing seasons for a few rounds in the winter.



For information on the USGA's Course Consulting Service Contact the Green Section Staff.

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