



Truth And Consequences

By Elliott Dowling, agronomist, Northeast Region and
David Oatis, regional director, Northeast Region

September 13, 2016

The summer of 2016 has been extremely challenging for golf courses in the Northeast Region; and it isn't over yet. The heat and humidity have been oppressive, and rainfall has been extreme or absent, depending on your location. In most years, turf managers anxiously wait for September, normally a month that favors turf recovery. Unfortunately, until very recently September has provided little relief from summer heat. Most golf courses have experienced some stress and turf thinning, if not total turf loss. Recovery is needed, but it has been slow to arrive because of the ongoing heat and lack of rainfall. Irrigation is not a substitute for natural rain, and the absence of rain is slowing germination and growth.



Dry seasons highlight irrigation deficiencies and pinpoint where adjustments are necessary.

September also marks the unofficial start of fall projects. Golf courses rely on fall projects and cultivation to improve turf health and playing conditions for next season. Unfortunately, the unseasonably hot, dry weather has caused some courses to scale back cultivation programs and postpone golf course improvement projects. If your grass is too weak to sustain traditional fall cultivation, implement a less-aggressive approach by using smaller tines and less sand until the weather improves. When the weather breaks, perform additional cultivation if it is needed to promote long-term improvement.

The silver lining of a difficult season is that infrastructure deficiencies are highlighted such that they are difficult to ignore. This fall is a good time to think about turning some of your course's weaknesses into strengths.

- **Irrigation coverage**—For courses that have experienced extremely dry conditions, now is a perfect time to document irrigation problems related to pumping, supply, control, coverage and other factors. Act soon before regular rainfall erases irrigation coverage problems that drought has exposed. If you haven't developed a drought emergency plan, this year has certainly shown why it is important to do so.
- **Drainage**—Irrigation often gets top billing, but nothing is more important than getting rid of excess water when it arrives in copious quantities. Keep in mind that surface and subsurface drainage are equally important. If your greens don't have good internal drainage, implement a deep soil-modification program or install an internal drainage system.
- **Trees**—Trees on a golf course can add beauty and strategy, but they also shade the turf, compete for moisture and can clog drain lines. Extremely wet or extremely dry, tree roots can cause problems.
- **Fans**—Fan technology has improved tremendously in recent years. Having one or more portable, gas-powered fans will provide another level of protection when faced with difficult summer weather. Some courses may have been able to avoid turf loss this summer if they had used a fan for a few weeks.
- **Grass species**—Breeding programs are continually developing new and improved turfgrass cultivars. If you have old “grass technology” it may be time to upgrade to a species or cultivar that can better withstand heat, drought, wear and disease.

The benefit of experiencing a challenging summer is that it highlights a golf course's strengths and weaknesses. Hopefully you can use this year to affect positive change at your golf course.

Northeast Region Agronomists:

David A. Oatis, regional director – doatis@usga.org

Adam Moeller, director, Green Section Education – amoeller@usga.org

James E. Skorulski, agronomist – jskorulski@usga.org

Elliott Dowling, agronomist – edowling@usga.org

Addison Barden, agronomist – abarden@usga.org

Paul Jacobs, agronomist – pjacobs@usga.org

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