

Trick Or Treat

By Paul Jacobs, agronomist, Northeast Region

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Playing a round of golf in late fall can be a real treat. Brisk air, vibrant colors and healthy turf are all conducive to enjoyable golf. Late-season warming trends have also added to the fall golf experience this year. However, [frost delays](#) are also part of fall golf and they require patience and cooperation from golfers to avoid unnecessary turf damage. Even on relatively warm days, early morning frost is still possible.

For golf course superintendents, balancing maintenance operations with fall projects can be quite tricky. Fewer rounds played each day means there is an opportunity to perform golf course improvement projects with minimal golfer disruption. However, maintenance teams still must perform the arduous task of leaf cleanup while maintaining the golf course for fall play. Once a project begins, superintendents know that the race is on to beat early winter snowfall. In some cases, staff members must be reassigned from maintenance tasks, such as leaf cleanup, to help with a project.

Fall leaf removal is a constant battle and areas that are clean can be quickly covered with a fresh coat of fallen leaves. For golfers, constantly searching for golf balls among



Finishing fall projects, managing frost delays and cleaning up leaves are all part of the challenge of golf course maintenance during fall.

the fallen leaves can make it seem like they were never removed. The feeling of frustration is mutual between golfers and maintenance personnel. Here are two ideas for dealing with the situation:

- Carefully document the cost of leaf removal. Cost analysis should include labor hours, fuel cost and equipment maintenance costs. Few budgets include the cost of leaf removal as part of a tree budget, but they should because it is important for golfers to know the full cost of trees.
- Evaluate the trees on the golf course and determine which are worth the extra labor and expense they entail. The costs may be worthwhile for good-quality trees; but if trees are unhealthy or causing agronomic problems, it might be worth enduring the one-time cost of removing them to reduce long-term maintenance costs. Combining leaf removal with the other [hidden costs of trees](#) can make selective tree removals easy to justify. Removing low-quality or poorly placed trees can improve turf health and performance during the summer and reduce cleanup costs during fall.

Maintenance departments often operate with fewer staff members during fall, making it challenging to keep up with course maintenance and fall projects. As golfers race to enjoy their last few rounds of the year, remember that maintenance teams are also racing to clean up leaves, maintain the course and finish fall projects.

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