



So This Is Spring

By David A. Oatis, regional director, Northeast Region | March 17, 2017



Cold weather and snow are likely to wreak havoc with flowering plants this spring.

A mild winter and warm February temperatures have been tantalizing golfers with the prospect of an early spring. Bulbs are blooming, trees are budding, and courses in the southern part of the region have already applied preemergence herbicides and annual bluegrass seedhead suppression treatments. However, Mother Nature has reasserted herself in typical fashion. Cold March temperatures chilled bermudagrass back into dormancy and slowed pest development while single-digit temperatures and brisk winds bring an uneasy feeling to turf managers in northern locations. The recent nor'easter brought heavy snowfall, which all but slammed the door on plant growth and pest development. So, what does all this mean for golf courses?

- Bermudagrass was off to a fast start this year, but the recent cold temperatures have stopped it in its tracks. No damage is suspected at this point, but it will take plenty of warm weather and sunshine to get it growing again.
- Northern courses that had nondormant putting green turf and experienced single-digit temperatures should remove and incubate a few plugs from greens to check for winter injury. Widespread damage is not suspected at this point, but some

injury may have occurred. Incubating plugs is the most effective way to gauge whether winter injury has occurred.

- Timing seedhead suppression treatments and preemergence herbicide applications has been difficult this year due to fluctuating temperatures; it is not going to get any easier going forward. Courses that made early seedhead suppression treatments may need to make additional applications because the seedhead production window will likely expand.
- Annual bluegrass weevils were active on many southern courses before the last two weeks of cold temperatures. Hopefully the cold will knock back their populations, but that may be hoping for too much. Turf managers should resume monitoring for annual bluegrass weevils once the snow melts.
- Recent high winds combined with heavy snowfall, ice and sleet will undoubtedly leave many courses covered with a layer of debris. More spring cleaning is in order for many.
- Temperatures always fluctuate during spring, but some years are worse than others. Late-winter and early spring temperature fluctuations result in a “start and stop” pattern for turf growth as well as pest and weed development. This makes timing control applications very difficult. It also produces inconsistent turf growth and makes turf more susceptible to wear problems. Don't overdo maintenance practices when turfgrass growth resumes. This is especially important with creeping bentgrass, because it is very susceptible to wear injury during spring.

The return of winter throughout much of the region is having impacts well beyond a deep layer of snow in many areas. Hopefully most courses will come through the cold snap unscathed and spring maintenance will soon fall into a normal routine. However, golfers may see a few more seedheads this spring, and perhaps a little more crabgrass and goosegrass this summer. For now, we will just have to wait out the cold weather and watch our college basketball tournament brackets.

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