



## Preparing For Winter: Don't Get Caught In The Cold

By Elliott Dowling, agronomist, Northeast Region | October 6, 2017



*Bermudagrass playing surfaces are in excellent condition – preparing for winter now will help ensure that they survive.*

**W**arm-season grasses are in excellent condition in the Northeast this fall, especially with the recent warm weather. However, focusing on playability too late into the fall and failing to prepare the turf for winter could lead to weak plants that are unable to withstand winter traffic or cold weather. Turf growth will start to slow as days shorten and nighttime temperatures decrease, making late summer and early fall the most critical times to prepare warm-season grasses for dormancy, winter play and next season. Here are a few practices that can help prepare warm-season grasses for winter:

- Begin raising the height of cut (HOC) on fairways and tees several weeks before the first expected frost. Target a minimum height of 0.75 inch. Raising the HOC increases leaf surface area, allowing plants to store more energy for winter.
- Discontinue plant growth regulator applications.
- Discontinue nitrogen fertilizer applications unless overseeding is occurring. If overseeding, do not apply more than 0.5 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet.

- If necessary, apply muriate of potash (0-0-60), potassium sulfate (0-0-50) or sulfate of potash magnesia (0-0-22). Ensuring potassium levels are sufficient reduces the risk of winter injury.
- Apply preemergence herbicides for *Poa annua* control.
- Do not vertical mow or core aerate during late summer unless the playing surfaces will be overseeded. There might not be time for plants to recover before winter, increasing the risk of winter injury.
- Utilize traffic control strategies that help weak turf regain strength before winter.
- Apply preventive fungicides for spring dead spot. Target a soil temperature of 65-70 degrees Fahrenheit for making applications. Due to the diverse climates in the Northeast, target application dates range from mid-August to late October.

There are no guarantees in this business, especially with winter injury. However, taking the appropriate measures to prepare warm-season turf for winter can reduce the chances of winter injury. Many of these same recommendations apply to cool-season grasses as well, especially for *Poa annua* putting greens in northern areas. Now is the time to start raising the HOC.

If your facility is interested in an alternative to playing golf on turf that has lost its color this winter, attend the free USGA turf colorant workshop December 4, 2017, at Farmington Country Club in Charlottesville, Virginia. The workshop will start at 10 a.m. with a short presentation then go outside for a demonstration before promptly concluding at 11:30 a.m. Contact your regional agronomist for more information.

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