



A Taste Of Spring

By Paul Jacobs, agronomist, Northeast Region | March 3, 2018



The perimeters of putting greens, tees and fairways can change over time. Early spring is a great time to correct these issues.

Winter has been quite the roller-coaster ride so far, with wild fluctuations in temperatures. Last week, most of the Northeast saw temperatures that were well above average. Records were even set in some areas. Mild winter temperatures cause dormant turf to imbibe water and lose some of its winter hardiness. This could increase susceptibility to winter injury for some species, particularly *Poa annua*. Extreme temperature drops now carry an increased risk of turf damage. If the temperature is forecast to drop significantly, consider covering *Poa annua* putting greens. Also, carefully remove any standing water from putting surfaces prior to freezing temperatures.

Precipitation has been plentiful throughout the Northeast, leaving many facilities soft and wet. This makes winter projects difficult to complete. If conditions improve, now is a great time to initiate early spring maintenance activities. Some examples include adjusting mowing lines and performing weed control at facilities with warm-season turf.

- Mowing patterns are best adjusted in early spring, before turf breaks dormancy. Turf will better adapt to a significant reduction in mowing height before it begins growing because only dormant leaf tissue will be removed. Early spring is a good time to modify mowing patterns on tees that are out of alignment, collars that have crept into a putting green or fairway perimeters. Adjusting mowing contours can

have a huge impact on aesthetics and playability. For some additional ideas and information on the process, review the USGA article “[Low Hanging Fruit.](#)”

- Weed control in areas where warm-season grasses are used can be achieved inexpensively with non-selective herbicides when the turf is fully dormant. Brief stretches of favorable weather have provided an opportunity for these types of applications. If warm weather continues and the desired warm-season turf begins to grow, only selective herbicides should be used.

As winter nears its end, golfer excitement builds and pressure mounts to get courses open and playable. Just remember that damage sustained by dormant or slow-growing turf is cumulative. Incurring damage from golfer traffic or maintenance operations now will last for weeks, perhaps months. Excessive early season play can get turf off to a bad start, setting the stage for problems like bumpy putting surfaces, heavily divoted tees and landing areas and golf cart wear patterns later in the season.

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

Paul Jacobs, agronomist - pjacobs@usga.org

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