

Daffodils are starting to pop in Pennsylvania and forsythias are beginning to bloom in Virginia, but green turf and smooth surfaces won't arrive for a while.

HARSH WINTER WEATHER: WHAT SHOULD WE EXPECT FROM OUR TURF?

BY DAVID OATIS | REGIONAL DIRECTOR, NORTHEAST REGION

Three Nor'easters in two weeks have knocked down trees and branches, caused serious flooding and erosion, and taken out power for many homes and businesses. Although the impact on golf courses is just now being assessed, expect additional unwanted debris and perhaps a few toppled trees because of the storms.

Sporadic cold temperature injury appears to have occurred on golf courses in coastal areas in the northern portion of the region. Fortunately, the damage doesn't appear to be widespread. Farther south, golf is being played. Here are a few things you can bet on seeing when you get out on the golf course:

- **Debris** — Even if your course was relatively clean a month or two ago, the recent storms brought high winds, heavy rain and wet snow that likely translate to tons of broken branches and a few downed trees. Cleanup may take a while because staff size usually is limited during winter and early spring.

Additionally, even the best-drained courses dry out slowly during the transition to spring. Turf injury will result if cleanup operations start before the ground dries out enough to handle traffic.

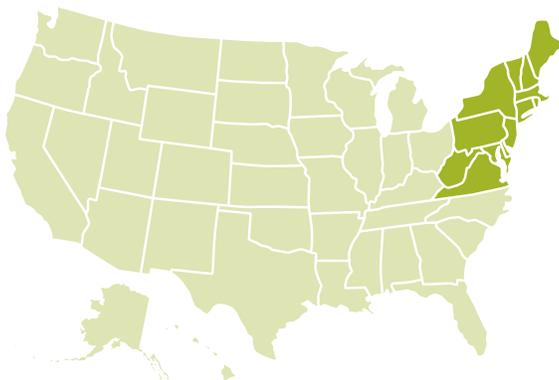
- **Off-color Turf** — Turf throughout the region is in various stages of spring green up, but consistent growth won't occur until consistently warm temperatures arrive. Based on the current weather forecast, that could be a while.
- **Bumpy Playing Conditions** — Most putting greens in the Northeast Region are a mixture of *Poa annua* and creeping bentgrass or a pure stand of one of the two species. Currently, courses with a monostand of creeping bentgrass have the best chances of providing smooth surfaces. Courses with a mixture of the two species are the least likely to have smooth surfaces. Different species break dormancy and initiate growth at different times. The same is true of different cultivars of the same species; their growth rates will vary as well. Even after green up, the growth rate of different species and cultivars won't even out until two to three weeks of consistently warm temperatures are experienced. In many areas of the region, golfers have weeks of bumpy playing conditions ahead.
- **Aeration Holes** — Spring is an excellent time to aerate turf, but cool temperatures will slow recovery. Nonetheless, aerating during early spring may result in less disruption of the golf calendar because fewer rounds are being played. However, early spring aeration followed by heavy traffic and a lengthy period of cool temperatures can result in undesirable wear. Waiting a little later in spring to aerate greens is a wise decision in many cases.

The aeration process is time-consuming and exhausting for staff. Aeration also can have a profoundly positive effect on turfgrass health and performance. Well-executed and properly timed spring aeration can set your putting greens up for a successful season, so don't take shortcuts and increase risk of problems later in the season.



For information on the USGA's Course Consulting Service Contact the Green Section Staff.

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