



*Aerating with smaller-diameter tines than usual will remove some organic matter while allowing slow-growing turf to heal more quickly.*

## OMAHA! OMAHA!

BY ELLIOTT DOWLING | AGRONOMIST, NORTHEAST REGION

Calling an audible is an important part of football. Many of us are familiar with Payton Manning's signature audible call, "Omaha," that he uses to alert his team to a change in the play call. Although calling an audible is associated with football, changing plans when necessary is just as important in golf course maintenance. Superintendents frequently must change their plans based on unexpected situations like poor weather – this spring is a perfect example.

The Northeast is experiencing a slow start to spring. The unseasonably cold weather affects all golf facilities regardless of budget, staff size or grass type. Both cool- and warm-season grasses have been slow to start growing. Consequently, golf courses are being forced to call audibles, most notably regarding spring cultivation programs.

Superintendents are struggling to decide whether to perform normal spring cultivation or call an audible of their own. Typically, spring cultivation consists of core aeration or verticutting combined with deep-tine

aeration or other surface management practices. Each of these procedures, either performed alone or in conjunction with others, benefit turf by removing and diluting organic matter. However, soil temperatures strongly influence the rate of recovery, hence the dilemma this spring. Grass simply is not aggressively growing thus far which will delay recovery.

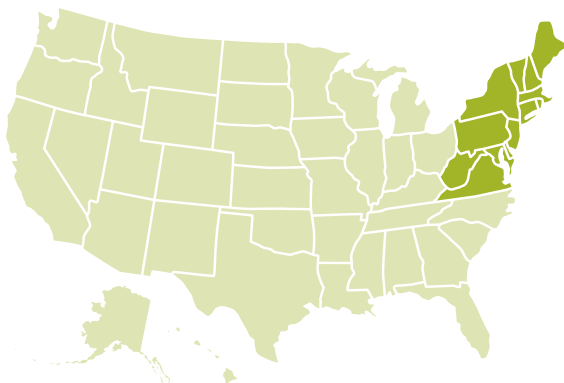
Rather than using traditional core aeration tines, which are 0.5-inch diameter or larger, smaller hollow tines or solid tines might be better options for some golf courses. Also consider adjusting the amount of sand applied to playing surfaces either during aeration or as part of routine topdressing. Brushing techniques may also need to be modified. While the benefits of sand topdressing are numerous and well-documented, applying sand to grass that is not growing can be injurious especially when followed by aggressive brushing. Sand topdressing is still important, but it is critical that sand application rates match the turf growth rate. If turf is growing slower than usual, plan on applying less sand.

Agronomic procedures should always be performed when best for the grass and not when best for the golf calendar. That said, many facilities are likely to call an audible this spring and utilize a less-disruptive form of cultivation. Some may even skip spring cultivation altogether. While this may cause less disruption this spring, these changes will need to be made up for later in the year or with more aggressive aeration this fall.



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