USGA
Green Section Record
REGIONAL UPDATE
May 4, 2018

A harsh winter followed by a cold spring has delayed turf growth and highlighted areas that are impacted by shade or inadequate drainage.

MAY 4TH OR FEBRUARY 88TH?

BY PAUL JACOBS | AGRONOMIST, NORTHEAST REGION

Unseasonably cool temperatures and a lack of turf growth have been topics of discussion throughout the Northeast. Courses in northern portions of the region are just starting to mow while courses farther south are dealing with sporadic bermudagrass winter injury. Recovery from winter has been very slow to date. The cool temperatures are prompting uncertainty about how turf will respond to the fast-approaching summer. During this period of slow spring growth, the following management considerations are particularly important:

Traffic management is critical, especially when turf is not actively growing. It is best to eliminate all traffic in damaged areas. Subjecting damaged turf to traffic can double the recovery time. In high-traffic areas, reduce wear by regularly shifting traffic patterns. This practice applies to both cool- and warm-season turf.

Bermudagrass growth has been especially slow in the Northeast this spring. In addition to the slow spring growth, some areas of bermudagrass were injured by extended periods of single-digit temperatures in January. Bermudagrass needs warm tempeatures to initiate growth and, unfortunately, there have been few days of suitable conditions. Here are a few things to keep in mind when managing bermudagrass areas in the Northeast this spring:

- Bermudagrass will not grow rapidly until the minimum air temperature is greater than 60 degrees Fahrenheit for five consecutive days and the soil temperature at a 4-inch depth at 11 a.m. exceeds 65 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Once growth accelerates, applications of soluble nitrogen at rates of 0.25-0.35 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet – applied every seven to 10 days – can help speed recovery. Fertilizer will not help if the turf is not growing.
- Covers can still be used in areas that have been damaged. Different covering techniques can facilitate recovery by warming soil temperatures 6-10 degrees Fahrenheit, or more. Also, since the damaged turf is covered, it is protected from traffic injury.

Aeration schedules have been modified at many facilities because of the cool temperatures and slow turf growth. Courses that did aerate are experiencing slower-than-usual recovery. Recovery will be slow until temperatures rise, so manage traffic by regularly moving tee markers, hole locations and directional signage. Avoid excessive traffic, sand topdressing and brushing until more vigorous growth resumes.

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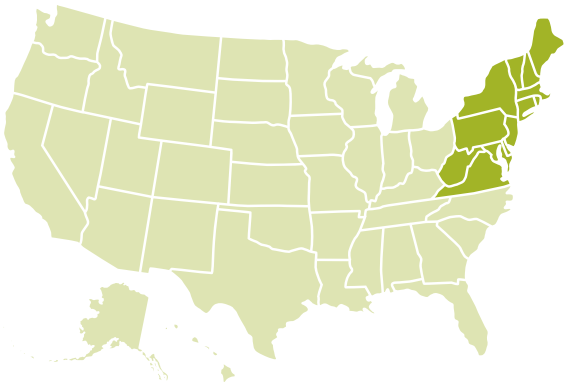
Plant growth regulator application frequency should be based on a growing degree day (GDD) model, not a calendar-based model. With cooler temperatures, reapplication intervals will be extended. Basing reapplication on the GDD model will help prevent overregulation, which is especially important if turf was damaged during winter. Consider using the Greenkeeper app to help track GDD and reapplication intervals.

A slow spring can be challenging because little can be done to expedite turf growth and recovery. Many superintendents are eager to do something to help speed up the process, but these efforts will have minimal impact until more favorable weather arrives. Instead, use this time to assess and document damaged areas. Preparing a plan to address damaged areas will help reduce the risk of future issues. Turf covers, improved drainage and wind fences can help reduce the likelihood of winter injury.

If you would like to discuss any of these issues with a USGA Agronomist, feel free to contact your regional office or register for a Course Consulting Service visit. Sign up before May 15 to receive a discounted rate.



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