



Putting green turf has been slow to recover from spring cultivation programs at many courses this spring.

COPING WITH A SLOW-GROWING, SNEEZY SPRING

BY DAVID OATIS | REGIONAL DIRECTOR, NORTHEAST REGION

Cool spring temperatures, slow turf growth and extraordinarily high pollen counts have been the hallmarks of this season so far. Both warm- and cool-season turf growth has been much slower than usual, which has caused wear problems and slow recovery from winter damage for courses throughout the Northeast.

Most putting greens in the Northeast are comprised of at least two species – creeping bentgrass and *Poa annua* – but some may even have velvet bentgrass or bermudagrass. All these grasses grow at different rates, particularly during spring, and their growth rates won't even out until consistently warm weather arrives.

Dilemma:

Different grass species are still off-color and growing at different rates at many courses. This can make for bumpy putting surfaces. However, pushing turf too hard now weakens it and sets the stage for problems during the summer months.

Options:

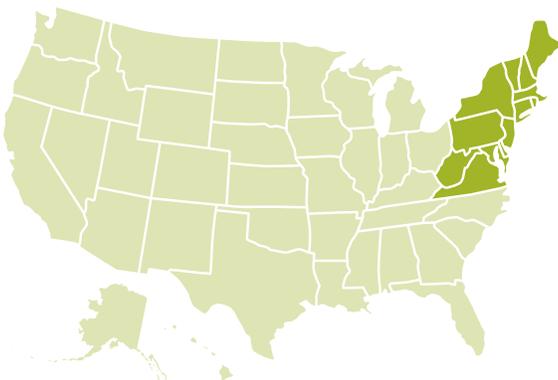
1. Low mowing heights can help with smoothing, but they also put more stress on turf and adversely affect rooting. Low heights of cut can weaken turf prior to the peak stress periods that are just around the corner.
2. Verticutting and topdressing also help to smooth surfaces, but verticutting thins turf and slow growth currently limits how much topdressing playing surfaces can absorb. Applying too much sand exacerbates the injury caused by golfer and maintenance traffic. As with low mowing heights, excessive verticutting and topdressing weakens turf, and there may not be enough time for recovery before summer temperatures and stress arrive.
3. A program of alternating between mowing and rolling is the best option for smoothing putting surfaces at many courses. Typically, courses are regularly performing both operations by this time of year. However, with this year’s cool temperatures and slow growth, a heavy diet of mowing and rolling on the same day will cause far too much wear at many courses.

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The third option will be the best for most courses. As temperatures warm and growth rates increase, the frequency of mowing, verticutting and topdressing can also increase. As long as turf growth is slow, remain conservative with surface management treatments.

It may be frustrating, but fertilizer will not produce extra growth when temperatures are too cool. Avoid the temptation to make more, or heavier, applications now because they will likely stimulate too much growth once warmer temperatures finally arrive. The weather may transition quickly from cool and wet to very hot, and that can be a shock for turf. Heavily fertilized turf fares very poorly in hot weather. Remember, for turf the golf season is a marathon not a sprint.

For allergy sufferers, keep up with your medications and hope for periodic bouts of rain to help reduce pollen counts. It’ll get better soon.



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