



Fall foliage is beginning to show its beauty. It is a reminder that this challenging growing season will soon come to an end.

SHIFTING GEARS

BY JIM SKORULSKI | AGRONOMIST, NORTHEAST REGION

Fall has come none too early for weak turf, weary golf course superintendents and maintenance staffs. It was a long, brutal season across much of the Northeast Region, and there are plenty of golf courses with evidence to prove it. Heat and humidity took their toll, lending to substantial disease and weed pressure. Most areas also have been very wet, causing short root systems and leaving playing surfaces soft and unstable. Mechanical injury from mowers, rollers, golfer traffic and even aeration has been widespread throughout the region.

Meanwhile, many northern areas have been struggling with abnormally dry weather which has taxed irrigation water supplies and damaged non-irrigated turf areas. Just recently, the first confirmed case of rapid blight disease in the Northeast was diagnosed at a golf course in Maine. Gray leafspot also has been common in many areas.

Maintenance priorities now should shift towards recovery, turf health, and winter acclimation, if they have not already. Facilities that have experienced turf loss need to be taking full advantage of what favorable

growing weather remains by reestablishing turf cover and readying turf for winter. Critical considerations include:

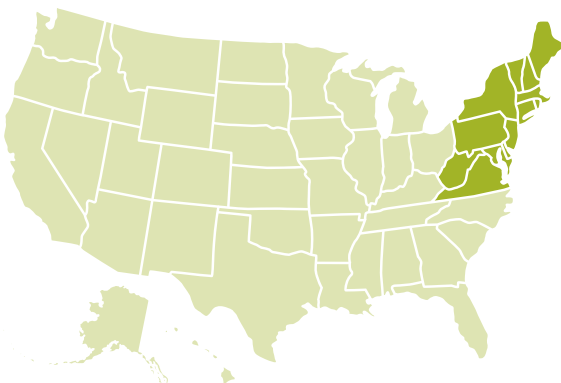
- Raising mowing heights on putting green turf. Height adjustments can be made slowly, in increments of 0.05 inch, to increase leaf tissue and the ability of turf to absorb sunlight. Sunlight is used by turf to produce energy for recovery and acclimation to cold winter temperatures.
- Using a balanced fertilizer to supply nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium, preferably in light and frequent applications that provide 0.2–0.25 pound of nitrogen and potassium per 1,000 square feet at a 10–14-day interval. Avoid the temptation to fertilize with high rates of nitrogen that will overpromote top growth late during fall.
- Reevaluating sun exposure across greens and other playing surfaces. Shade patterns vary widely across seasons. Monitor shade patterns and use a sun-positioning app to identify shade issues. Address severe shade issues to provide playing surfaces with as much sun exposure as possible during fall. Remember, you do not want anything blocking nature’s solar panels.
- Begin planning late-fall maintenance including disease-management programs and strategies to protect greens from cold-temperature injury. Check the condition of covers and insulating materials. Replace or repair torn or punctured impermeable covers. Determine what greens will need protection from the wind and identify where and what actions can be taken to prevent water from sheeting across or collecting on playing surfaces during winter.



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

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Golf course superintendents, maintenance staffs and their families need some recovery too. Use the fall to reconnect with family and friends, and make a little time to do what you most enjoy. After all, fall should be a time when we can work to live and enjoy that for which we have been working.



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