USGA
Green Section Record
REGIONAL UPDATE
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Cold November temperatures mark the beginning of work to install cover systems at golf courses across the Northeast Region.

ARE YOU COVERING YOUR GREENS THIS WINTER?

BY JIM SKORULSKI | AGRONOMIST, NORTHEAST REGION

Using turf covers is frequently debated this time of year. Advocates for cover systems value the protection they provide against desiccating winds, cold temperatures and ice encasement. Those who choose not to cover their greens raise concerns about the costs, effort and occasional negative impacts associated with using covers. The resolution usually lies somewhere in the middle. For some, turf covers are valuable tools; but for others they are unnecessary.

Few managers will accept the added costs and management responsibilities associated with cover systems if they don't believe they are necessary. Many golf courses that manage annual bluegrass in northern climates use cover systems to avoid extensive and frequent turf losses across putting greens. Similarly, many courses in with bermudagrass greens use covers to insulate the warm-season grass from damaging cold temperatures. Selecting the right cover system to match your site and location is critical. Table 1

TABLE 1

Cover Systems	Function	Site Conditions
Permeable cover	Prevent wind desiccation and promote early spring greenup. Provides minimal insulation.	Exposed sites or shaded, weak greens requiring early spring growth.
Impermeable cover alone	Prevent wind desiccation, winter plant hydration and ice encasement. Provides minimal insulation.	Greens with poor surface drainage and a history of ice encasement. Best for areas with continuous snow cover and/or more moderate temperatures.
Impermeable cover combined with an insulating layer. *	Prevent wind desiccation, winter plant hydration and ice encasement. Provides insulation.	Greens with poor surface drainage and a history of ice encasement. Best for cold locations where potentially damaging cold temperatures are a concern and winter snow cover is not dependable.

* An insulating layer typically is created by using rigid or soft materials to create an air space under a cover, between it and the surface of a turf area.

highlights the most frequently used cover systems and their intended purposes.

The following questions will help you determine if a cover system would be a practical addition to your winter management program and, if so, what type of cover system you should consider:

- What is the frequency and severity of cold temperature injury on your golf course?
- What type of winter injury is most common?
- What is the predominant grass species?
- What is the expected average low temperature?
- Are the surfaces open or protected by continuous snow cover?
- Is surface drainage effective?
- Is there dense shade during fall and winter?
- Are resources available to purchase, install and manage cover systems throughout winter?

The discussion over whether to use covers will continue. Consider yourself fortunate if you do not need to use winter cover systems. If you decide to cover try to adapt the system you choose to best meet your needs. Also, accept the fact that covering greens does not guarantee an injury-free winter, but that they do make it possible to more reliably provide quality putting surfaces during spring.

We encourage you to attend one of the upcoming educational conferences listed below where industry experts will discuss winter programs and other management topics:

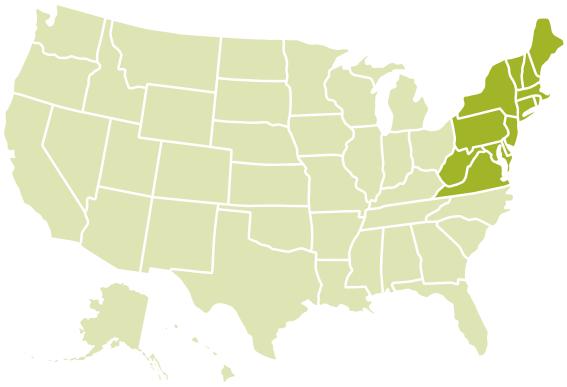
VGCSA Conference and Annual Meeting, December 3-4, Darden Conference and Event Center, Charlottesville, VA.

NJTA Green Expo Conference and Trade Show, December 4-6, Borgata Hotel in Atlantic City, N.J.

New Hampshire Winter Educational Conference, December 5, The Grappone Center in Concord, N.H.

Salon et Séminare Québécois sur le Gazon, December 10-11, Chateau-Bromont in Bromont, Quebec.

Maryland Turfgrass Conference, December 11, Turf Valley Resort and Conference Center in Ellicott City, Md.



NORTHEAST REGION AGRONOMISTS:

David Oatis, Regional Director, doatis@usga.org

James Skorulski, Agronomist, jskorulski@usga.org

Elliott Dowling, Agronomist, edowling@usga.org

Paul Jacobs, Agronomist, pjacobs@usga.org

Information on the USGA's Course Consulting Service

Contact the Green Section Staff