



Dry Conditions, Core Aeration and Winter Preparations

By Adam Moeller, agronomist, Northeast Region

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Much of the Northeast has experienced abnormally dry or moderate drought conditions over the last 6-8 weeks, and golfers have enjoyed firm fairways with plenty of roll out thanks to dry weather. Behind the scenes, the dry weather has been challenging superintendents to maintain the appropriate balance between playing conditions, turf health and aesthetics. The USGA *Green Section Record* article [Irrigate for Playability and Turf Health, Not Color](#) is a good source of information on the benefits of maintaining turf on the dry side and why some areas of off-color turf should be acceptable. Some of the most common challenges superintendents have battled as a result of the dry weather include:

- Drought-stressed turf, especially in the rough
- Cart damage from players driving over wilting or drought-stressed turf
- Fairy ring disease and water-repellent soils
- Water-quality issues have been more pronounced, affecting turf performance



The remnants of drought stress may be visible for the next few weeks despite recent rain. Overseeding may be needed to fill in thin areas affected by the drought.

- Over-budget on water costs and labor for hand watering
- Soggy conditions in low-lying areas and/or where the automatic irrigation system coverage/accuracy is poor
- Trees dropping leaves early due to drought stress

Recent rain storms have rehydrated soils to some extent, but many courses are still well shy of replacing the water lost through evapotranspiration (ET) – i.e., water lost from the soil and turf – over the past six weeks. One course reported less than 4 inches of rain between July and early September while ET exceeded 14 inches of water over the same period. Automatic irrigation systems supplement rainfall, but they cannot overcome long periods without rain. Do not be surprised to see the remnants of drought-stressed turf on your course despite recent rainfall. To help introduce drought-tolerant and disease-resistant turfgrasses and fill in thin areas, rough overseeding programs have started at many courses.

Golf facilities that performed core aeration in August are healed and primed for a great fall. Although core aeration is disruptive for a week or two, it is one of the most important cultural programs that allows your golf course superintendent to produce good golf surfaces. The USGA *Green Section Record* articles [Core Cultivation: Timing is Everything](#) and [Easing the Pain of Core Aeration](#) are excellent references to learn why aeration programs are done during certain times of the season.

Fall is a great time for weed control and many superintendents are working hard to clean up contaminated areas. Bermudagrass and creeping bentgrass contamination in rough is a major problem at many courses. Pylex[®] (topramezone) and Tenacity[®] (mesotrione) herbicide programs will help reduce bermudagrass and creeping bentgrass populations, respectively.

Courses with bermudagrass playing surfaces are starting to prepare turf for winter by raising mowing heights and spoon feeding nitrogen every few weeks. However, do not overstimulate growth with nitrogen because doing so could increase disease and reduce winter hardiness. Preventative spring dead spot disease applications should begin as soil temperatures reach 60-80 degrees at a 2-inch depth.

The fall equinox is a great time to closely examine sun exposure on putting greens, fairways and teeing grounds. Observing shade on key playing areas during the fall equinox means the turf will enter winter (and summer) weaker compared to areas with full sun. Removing trees may not be popular, but there is no superintendent, construction method or product that can overcome serious shade issues.

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