



“The Frost Is On The Punkin And The Fodder’s In The Shock”

By David Oats, regional director, Northeast Region

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Fall is my favorite time of year. Turfgrass stresses drop off and the cool, clear air is refreshing. There are pumpkins and apples to pick, pies to bake, chili to make, projects to tackle. Oh, and there is the brilliant foliage, but – there always is a “but” – with fall comes the need to rake leaves, cut down and remove dead ornamental plants and clean up other debris. The shorter days bother some folks, but to me they’re just a sign we need to slow down and smell the roses – or perhaps those baking pies. As you prepare for winter, here are a few things to keep in mind:



Between the blue skies, cooler temperatures and brilliant fall color, fall is a wonderful time of year.

- Most courses have a tree budget, but I’ve never seen one that comes close to capturing the real cost of trees ([The Hidden Cost of Trees](#)). Leaf cleanup is a great example of one seldom accounted for, tree-related practice. Most courses clean up leaves – and some track the labor and fuel costs involved – but how many courses account for that cost in a tree budget? Seriously, where else should it go? This is a good time to start keeping better track of tree-maintenance costs.
- Sun angles change throughout the year. With the winter solstice a little more than a month away, take note of trees that are now shading your turf. Fall sunlight is critical to the hardening process and some trees weren’t causing shade problems a month or two ago. Turf that is shaded

in the fall is weaker entering winter, essentially guaranteeing that it also will emerge from winter in a weakened state.

- Don't forget that there is a strong correlation between winter shade and winter injury. More light often translates to better winter survival.
- Frost:
 - Traffic on frozen turfgrass plants crushes them; it's as simple as that. If you want healthier turf, keep traffic off your turf when it's frozen.
 - As you wrestle with frost delays at your golf course, take note that the weakest and most problematic turf usually is in the areas that experience the most frost. What's the point? Tree work around critical turf areas can reduce frost delays. More sunlight helps the turf too.
- Temporary greens:
 - No one likes them, but they serve an important purpose.
 - The damaging effects of traffic accumulate when turf growth slows or stops. It isn't so much the number of rounds per day that is cause for concern, it is the total amount of traffic that the turf receives between the time growth slows and when it resumes again in the spring. A few rounds per day may not seem like a lot of traffic but it adds up over time.
 - Limiting golfer traffic during the winter reduces wear during a time of year when turf can't readily recover from damage.
 - No putting greens play well when they are dormant or frozen, so why not shift play to temporary greens and alleviate one stress factor on your greens?
 - Take some time now to develop better-quality temporary greens. Start by putting some imagination into their shape and location. Mowing height reductions combined with topdressing and brushing can produce reasonable putting surfaces for the fall.

Using temporary greens can mean better putting greens next season.

- Also monitor traffic on warm-season turf. Excessive traffic – e.g., cart traffic on fairways or foot traffic on greens – with wet weather can buy you more problems next year. Being conservative with traffic management now can make a big difference.

Enjoy the fall

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