Updates From The Frontlines: Bentgrass Putting Greens

By Chris Hartwiger, director, Course Consulting Service

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Day lengths are getting shorter and nighttime temperatures have started to move back into the mid- to low 60s on a regular basis. This typically marks the end of the summer stress period for creeping bentgrass putting greens in the Southeast. Below are a few observations made during travels this summer.

Portable fans are a great tool to promote bentgrass recovery in high-stress areas.

Observation 1: Wet and cool not a bad combination for bentgrass putting greens

As soil temperatures begin to rise into the 80s, bentgrass root systems invariably suffer and die back. Over the last few years, the Southeast has experienced a variety of summertime conditions. The summer of 2007 was a very hot and dry summer with record-breaking drought and many days above 100°F. The summers of 2010, 2011 and 2012 were hot and wet summers, but remembered equally because of such wide fluctuations in temperature and rain. 2013 has been odd as it has been very wet and unusually cool. In fact, Alabama state climatologist Dr. John Christy reported that the summer of 2013 in Alabama was the fifth coolest in the last 131 years (The Alabama Weather Blog). Given a choice between hot and dry, hot and wet, or cool and wet, bentgrass seems to perform better with cool and wet weather as has been the case in 2013.

Observation 2: Fans are great tools

Fans continue to earn their keep on bentgrass putting greens during hot weather. As a noted pathologist once remarked, "The best fungicide in my trials is a fan." Fans were able to provide surface drying and allow transpiration to continue (which serves to cool the plant) during very humid conditions this summer. A new trend with fans is to have a number of portable fans available to move about the course as needed to treat areas of high stress. Using this approach, superintendents may position a fan for three to seven days on the edge of a green near a high- stress area. It is remarkable to see how well the grass responds to the additional air movement.

Observation 3: Great plant protectants are available

Was disease pressure high this summer? You bet. Rain and more rain was followed by days of cloudy weather. The upper rootzone and turf canopy combined for a veritable petri dish suitable to a host of diseases. Amazingly, we observed few disease issues on bentgrass putting greens. The plant protectants available today are at an all-time high in disease prevention.

Observation 4: Core aeration is a go

Since the record cool temperatures experienced in mid-August, we have noticed new root initiation in soil profiles taken from creeping bentgrass putting greens. As the grass is responding favorably to cooler weather, now is a good time to begin fall aeration. Once this is accomplished, golfers should expect a great fall golfing season on bentgrass putting greens in the Southeast.

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Information on the USGA's Course Consulting Service

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