



Spring Is Near, But Not Here

By Chris Hartwiger, director, Course Consulting Service | March 3, 2017



Aeration is a rite of spring at many golf courses. The long-term benefits, such as improved internal drainage, outweigh the temporary disruption to play.

There is no grass on the fairways, what is going on?

Golfers often are surprised to find that fairway turf doesn't have the same quality during early spring as it did during fall. They may even want to know why the turf is different and what can be done to improve playing conditions.

Most golf courses in the Southeast Region have warm-season turfgrasses on their playing surfaces. Warm-season turfgrasses experience some period of reduced growth, or no growth at all, during winter. When slow-growing or dormant turf is subjected to traffic injury from carts it cannot recover from the damage. Traffic damage can accumulate during winter, leaving warm-season fairway turf at its lowest quality right before spring greenup.

The best way to improve late-winter and early spring turf quality is to keep carts on paths during winter. The article, "[Winter Play – When to Go and When to Say No](#)" provides more information about managing winter play on golf courses.

Why are the putting greens so slow all of a sudden?

This common late-winter question often is asked by year-round golfers at courses with ultradwarf bermudagrass putting greens. It only takes four or five days of temperatures in the mid-70s to cause new growth on ultradwarf bermudagrass putting greens; this new growth causes an immediate decrease in green speed.

Late-winter warmups must be dealt with cautiously by the superintendent and patiently by golfers. Cold weather and frosts still occur at this point in the season and overstressing putting greens before the growing season begins may hamper their performance when the weather improves. If golfers can be patient with late-winter playing conditions they will be in for a good season of golf as temperatures begin to warm.

Do we have to aerate? The greens are fantastic right now.

Golfers that typically play on creeping bentgrass putting greens may ask this question as the weather starts to improve. Spring aeration looms large on a golf course calendar and some golfers cannot bear to see excellent putting greens disrupted.

Course officials should remind golfers that aeration is a temporary disruption and that skipping necessary preventative maintenance practices can be hazardous to the long-term performance of putting greens.

The transition from winter to spring brings its own set of golf course maintenance challenges. Staying on the right track as the seasons change will help the turf on your course meet expectations throughout the year.

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