

Playing Defense In The Heat

By Pat Gross, regional director, West Region | September 1, 2017



It is important to provide adequate soil moisture and spot water as necessary to promote putting green health during hot weather.

The limited precipitation, low humidity and excessive wind that are common to many parts of the West during winter can quickly dry out turfgrass plants. Exposed areas, such as south-facing bunker slopes, are the most vulnerable to desiccation from these conditions.

Each year, Steve Sarro, director of grounds at Pinehurst Country Club in Denver, and his team cover select bunker slopes with straw blankets just before the ground freezes to protect the turf from desiccation. These blankets are a highly effective way to retain moisture in the crowns and root zones. Covering desiccation-susceptible turf areas with straw blankets during the past two winters has saved the staff at Pinehurst Country Club countless hours of labor-intensive soil prep, sodding and hand watering to repair damaged turf in the spring. Much of the West Region has been experiencing a heat wave, which is taking a toll on *Poa annua* putting greens. As described in the article, "[Burning the Candle at Both Ends](#)," when temperatures rise above 90 degrees Fahrenheit, the amount of energy produced by cool-season turfgrasses declines while the amount of energy they consume significantly increases. This results in turf stress and weakened root systems. Now is the time to [play defense](#) if you are managing *Poa annua* putting greens. Here are five strategies to help putting greens survive a heat wave:

1. Ensure putting greens have enough soil moisture in the morning to support plant health throughout the day. Use portable moisture meters and soil probes to check soil moisture and hand water dry areas as necessary before the hottest part of the day.
2. Apply soil wetting agents at routine intervals to help maintain balanced soil moisture and prevent the formation of localized dry spots.
3. Slightly raise putting green mowing heights. Even raising the mowing height by 0.03-inches improves photosynthesis and the ability of plants to survive.
4. Adjust mowing practices to avoid excessive mechanical stress, especially during hot weather. Typical strategies employed during hot weather include switching from grooved front rollers to solid rollers on reel mowers and alternating between mowing and rolling putting greens.
5. Improve air movement around putting greens. A slight breeze across the turf surface, especially in combination with syringing, helps cool turf. Where air movement is a problem, some courses have installed oscillating fans around putting greens. If fans are not an option, a leaf blower can be used in combination with a misting system as described in the article, "[Buffalo Blow Your H₂O.](#)"

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