

The Back Nine

A column for writers and members to air and share their views on golf greenkeeping topics

The second part of Ian Tomlinson's article on snow sees him offer his conclusions on dealing with the white stuff after describing his winters in Scandinavia

Last winter we left the snow on the greens and as warm air was forecast we started to remove the snow by February. If you have a large volume of snow on the greens and the temperatures are rising removal of the snow is a good thing.

The greens came out clean. I was very pleased - but 24 hours later I had lost five greens to snow mould. I had never experienced this situation before. It seems that the fungal spores were just sitting on the green surface. As the temperature rose the top 1cm of the green thawed and water was in evidence - it seemed the fungal spores were carried right throughout the green and a green which was blemish free 24 hours earlier had 60% of the turf removed. Frightening.

The winter of 2010/2011 was another tough one for us. Rain fell mid November and the next day 30cm of the white stuff came down. The greens were not frozen. This situation is dangerous. I have seen snow mould fungus up to 30cm in diameter covered in mycelium form in less than 24 hours under this condition. The temperature fell to -12 yet the snow insulated the green and the turf surface was still not frozen. We removed the snow as more was forecast.

The greens were clean but as the temperature was hovering around -10 the greens now froze - perfect scenario. The snow returned but we were a lot more relaxed. As a team we decided we would remove the snow on the greens in shaded environments when necessary and leave the good greens out in the open covered. The snow was down for ten weeks, and the result was no damage by snow mould. In contrast the remainder of the course was seriously attacked. Fairways on the seven holes which grow on peat and have high smooth stalk meadowgrass content really suffered due to these soils holding more



moisture and a grass species more susceptible to disease. The other fairways with higher, finer grass content and a better clay soil had a lot less damage. We had only five days when the temperature rose above freezing from the middle of November to March.

In my experience fescue greens will get attacked by snow mould but it is not an issue. They play as normal, firm and true, and the discoloured blemishes disappear very fast in spring. It seems that young fescue turf is attacked quite easily by snow mould in the first few years but then seems to build up a resistance.

Some colleagues state that removing snow off the greens midwinter can cause just as much damage to the grass by desiccation. I have personally not experienced this. One winter I had greens with no snow cover but it was -25 and there was no damage. Again, the outcome is dependent on the grass types you have. Poa annua is top of the list of grasses susceptible to death by desiccation and fescue the least.

about the author



Ian Tomlinson

Ian began his greenkeeping career at Scarcroft Golf Club in 1976 before spending 14 years at Lausanne Golf Club in Switzerland. He returned briefly to the UK before taking up his current position as Course Manager at Rungsted Golf Club in Denmark. Ian's wife and children live with him in Denmark. He loves the lifestyle and scenery, but loathes the Danish taxman who ensures that the cost of living is incredibly high with two thirds of his salary disappearing in taxes!

To sum up:

- Harden off the turf with Iron Sulphate, Potassium Sulphate and Seaweed.

- Aerate as much as possible and try and leave the holes open before the snow comes.

- Promote good cultural practices to keep disease at bay by removing dew and good woodland management around your green sites to allow air and sunlight in.

- Direct your greens management programme towards favouring the finer grasses over poa annua. The day fungicides are removed you will be glad that you did.

- If there is a risk of snow mould damage due to weather and environment remove the snow.

- If a layer of ice has formed on your greens try to crack it.

I hope that some of this information will help you decide the best course of action to take in the future as global warming becomes more of an issue and fungicides are removed by the EU!

The views expressed within this column are not necessarily those of Greenkeeper International