

Weird Fall Weather Segues to An Unusual Winter

September and October were cool and wet for the most part. In Lemont, we recorded over 7" of rain for these two months. The cool, wet weather pattern changed drastically, however, and November was one of the warmest on record for most eastern regions of the U.S., and it was fairly dry until the last week of the month. This warm-weather trend continued well into December, which had many superintendents wondering if they had "blown out" their irrigation systems and sprayed for snow molds a little too early this year.

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Also, turf managers in many regions of the country reported that some dormant trees and shrubs were beginning to bloom (or break buds) in late November. In the transition zone and farther south, many superintendents reported that warm-season grasses such as bermudagrass had reversed their progression toward winter dormancy and were turning green and growing again. This raises questions as to the winter survivability of both woody ornamentals and warm-season grasses once truly cold conditions arrive, but these concerns are probably not applicable to most of Illinois (at least not the northern half of the state).

We did receive a number of questions about how this late warm spell was affecting the turf leading into winter, including possible effects on fall pest controls. One frequent observation was that the high soil moisture and extended warm temperatures seemed to promote a lot of earthworm activity, especially in fairways. Some late-season mowings were disrupted by worm castings, and some fairways were reported to be pretty much un-mowable. However, in general, most of us in the turf science end of things still think earthworm activity should be viewed as a positive, not a negative.

Second, a number of superintendents were concerned that the late warm spell would increase the amount of winter kill we see on northern turf species, especially *Poa annua*. This can happen under several circumstances, including when there is a sudden cold spell following unseasonably warm and wet weather. We don't think this will be a big problem at this point, even though some significantly cold air moved through the region around Christmas. Turf that is most likely to see damage now would be in low areas where water collects and ice sheets can form.

Also, there were a number of questions as to whether snow-mold fungicides would lose effectiveness as late November rains fell and the turf continued to grow. In general, there is good evidence that snow-mold applications hold pretty well against rainfall and warmer temperatures, and in most cases, mowing after a snow-mold application won't remove a significant amount of fungicide from the turf canopy. Most of the fungicides we use have some systemic activity (except Daconil and related chlorothalonil products) and have a fairly long half-life in thatch and soil. PCNB is one of the most widely used

fungicides on fairways in northern Illinois, and rainfall or mowing following application would probably not have a significant negative effect on snow-mold control with PCNB through the winter because of its systemic movement and long half-life in the thatch. However, if we have a mild winter and a cool, wet spring, re-treatment for control of pink snow mold in the March-May timeframe may be necessary in '02.

As mentioned previously, the warm and dry conditions of November allowed some delayed fall construction projects to continue later into the season than planned. Most turf that was sodded and seeded very late had a chance to become well-established before winter dormancy because of the warm weather. We found ourselves in a weather-induced predicament at Midwest Golf House, where Wadsworth Construction has been working since August to build our three-hole Short Course. Over 18" of rain fell in Lemont from late July through the end of October, which drastically slowed all phases of

the project—from early earth-moving to grading, installation of irrigation and finishing of greens construction. We had hoped to be finished and have most of the course seeded by the end of September, but we actually came to a close on construction around the middle of November . . . ! Slopes around tees, greens and bunkers were sodded November 5-12 to prevent soil erosion over the winter; unfortunately, no seed will be planted until next spring.

All in all, it was a very unusual transition into winter, but we will take it!



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