



Making the Most of the “Dog Days”

August is my most trying month as a golf course superintendent. The turf is under stress, the prolonged summer heat also has taken its toll on the crew, and the members seem to be little edgy during the dog days of summer. Certain familiar aromas, sounds, sights and feelings all signal August to me.

*The August air
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and stagnant,
and it doesn't
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because the new air
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Unlike early April's aroma of freshly mown grass that literally uplifts one's spirits to the onset of another golfing season, the aroma emitted during August more resembles a stuffy and stagnant locker. August is always in need of an air freshener. And as I pass a flowerbed with Nicotiana, the air nearby is a little more tolerable.

Most of our season, the morning air is usually filled with birds chirping and singing. Then, during August, it's only a chirp here and there and then the loud, obnoxious locusts and cicadas echo loudly why August is my least favorite month. After all those years underground, the poor cicada emerges during the doldrums of summer—August.

The August air is thick, musty and stagnant, and it doesn't seem to matter if the wind blows because the new air is just as stagnant, musty and thick. The haziness just nags on the human spirit. The once-lush green landscape goes dormant as if it were the dead of winter.

There is a feeling of edginess to August. And during my 19 years' experience as a superintendent, I have not quite been able to put my finger on it. But I think I'm closer to figuring it out. During the previous months, we are busy topdressing, aerifying, verticutting, grooming, double-cutting and rolling greens to manipulate a measurable improvement in playability. During August, however, doing less is better. Instead of promoting the turf to respond, doing less will help the turf survive. It's hard to just take it easy.

August is, however, a perfect juncture to spend time with the crew during a cookout or half-day function away from the golf course. The employees at Elgin Country Club look forward to the employee appreciation day held each August. The children are exhausted after a day filled with games and food. Numerous members can't wait to show their gratitude by serving the employees. The effects of this single day are long-lasting.

August is also a perfect time to analyze past performance and make notes that would be useful come budget time when the snow starts falling. And if fall projects are on the horizon, timelines and budgets can be double-checked. I guess there's plenty reason to frown upon the many shortcomings of August, but there is much to be gained. Opportunities present themselves: employee-appreciation functions, budgeting and project planning, allowing the turf to survive, to name a few. I hope all of you can find ways to make my least favorite month a productive one.

