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# WINTERKILL OF TURFGRASSES: Causes and Prevention

*Dr. Tony Koski, Extension Turfgrass Specialist, Colorado State University*

**W**interkill, an all encompassing term used to describe winter-related turf loss, accounts for most of the dead turf that we see during the year on golf courses in Colorado and the Rocky Mountain region. Winter-related turf injury, more specifically, results from the actions of, winter desiccation, direct low temperature injury, low-temperature fungi, or winter-active mites. In order to control or prevent the problem effectively, it is important to recognize the conditions under which these modes of winter injury occur.

Winter desiccation is basically drought stress that occurs during the winter, Suboptimal soil moisture level, combined with environmental conditions that promote evaporation, create a situation under which the plant begins to dehydrate. Intense sun, high/constant wind, and low relative humidity are the types of climatic conditions which increase the severity of winter desiccation. Other factors which predispose turf to this type of injury include: compacted soil, frozen soil, excessive thatch, late core cultivation which results in open holes during the winter, and design aspects which increase exposure to drying winds and promote excessive drainage/runoff (elevated tees and greens, bunker edges, hills, etc.). With the exception of frozen soil, the same conditions cause dehydration and wilt during the growing season. At that time, we irrigate accordingly, either to prevent drought stress from occurring or to relieve wilt conditions as we recognize their occurrence. Unfortunately, the symp-

toms of winter desiccation are not as obvious as those for summer drought stress.

While certain parts of the plant can withstand rather intense dehydration (crown, stolons, rhizomes), other parts may quickly die under less than severe drying conditions. For example, leaves



are most sensitive, and we recognize the seasonal browning of turf during the winter as natural. Turfgrass plants can easily regrow new leaves during the spring, as long as the growing points in the crown that produce new leaves are not similarly desiccated. When winter drying conditions become severe enough, even the resistant crowns, rhizomes, and stolons will die. At this point, there are no growing points left to regrow new plants and leaves, and the turf has "winterkilled."

The most obvious way to prevent winter desiccation is to maintain adequate moisture in the root zone of valuable turf areas (tees, greens), and on those areas which, predictably, winterkill when not supplied with some winter irrigation. This is often done via the use of frost-free lines or by using large tanks or sprayers. A few timely applications of water over the course of an especially dry winter can make the difference between live and dead turf the following spring.

Windbreaks, either natural (trees and shrubs) or artificial (snow fences), can be quite helpful in decreasing wind speed and by allowing snow cover to remain for longer periods of time. Sensitive sites can also be covered with brush, evergreen limbs, etc., which ameliorate wind effects and promote snow accumulation. The brush can be easily removed in the spring. On greens or tees that will not be used during the winter, superintendents often see success with a late-fall top dressing (0.4 cubic feet per 1000 square feet) that is not dragged or raked into the turf.

Of course, the most sophisticated protection involves the use of synthetic covers. While expensive, weigh the cost of covers against turf replacement costs and lost revenues, not to mention unhappy golfers and green committee members! There is a great deal of variation in material composition, thickness, durability, etc., that should be considered before purchasing covers. Talk to others with experience in this area to better ascertain which type is likely to perform best in your situation.

*(continued on page 22)*

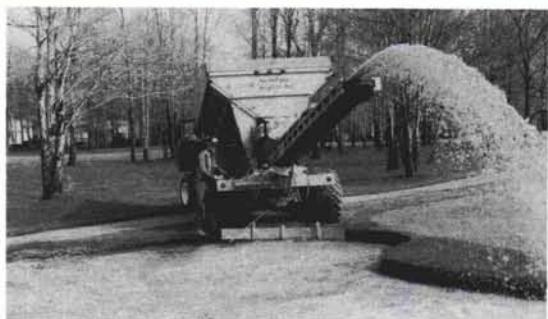


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# the Bull Sheet

## DATES TO REMEMBER

February 19-23 – Indiana-Illinois Turfgrass Short Course, for info call Jack Lagershausen 312/201-0101 (ITF)

February 26-March 1 – UW School of Turfgrass Management, call Lee Gottschalk 608/263-1672

August 20 – Wisconsin Turfgrass Field Day at O. J. Noer Turfgrass Research & Education Facility, Madison, WI. Contact Audra Anderson 608/845-6563

March 12 – MAGCS monthly meeting at the Golf Club Oak Brook Hills

April 4 – CDGA Green Seminar, Drury Lane Theater, Oak Brook

Congratulations to Glen Bereiter on his move to Aldeen Golf Club in Rockford. Glen started on January 3, 1996.

With Glen's move to Aldeen G.C., that makes this job opening possible: Mundelein Park District – Steeple Chase G.C. seeks a golf course superintendent for an 18 hole upscale golf facility. Require individual with at least 3 years experience maintaining bentgrass greens, tees and fairways. Send resume to Mundelein Park & Recreation District, 100 N. Seymour, Mundelein, IL 60060. Attention Alex Marx.

Bonnie Dundee Golf Club with the Dundee Park District is looking for an Assistant Superintendent. Send resumes to : Mike Sprouse, Dundee Township Park District, 21 N. Washington Street, Carpentersville, IL 60110, 847/551-4315.

Kevin DeRoo of Bartlett G.C. is looking for a mechanic. He states there are good benefits. Kevin also said that the old clubhouse/barn is no longer and a new clubhouse is being built. Call 708/483-4991.

## Necrology

It is with a deep sense of loss that we announce the death of Howard Baerwald's Wife last December 12, 1995. Howard is the retired superintendent of LaGrange C.C.

Also Leo Cleary of the W.A. Cleary Chemical Corporation passed away on December 11, 1995. Leo was 85 years old and died at home.

For Sale: Jacobsen F-10 tractor and a Ford 2000 tractor. Call Pete Leuzinger at 847/566-2050 or Randy Cass 847/566-9257.

The United States Golf Association has selected Olympia Fields Country Club as host of the 18th United States Senior Open Championship to be held June 23-29, 1997. It was 25 years ago in 1971 that Olympia Fields hosted the Western Open.

Tony Brzinski left Idelwild C.C. last August to construct Twin Bridges G.C. in Danville, Indiana. His new number is 317/745-9998.

Dave Holler became the new Superintendent, replacing Tony at Idlewild C.C. Dave is looking for an assistant at the present time. Call 708/798-4927.

"Chicagoland's Tremendous Trees" is a search for our biggest trees. You can join the search by participating in this program. You don't have to be an expert to nominate a tree. There are eight easy steps to do so. If interested write to : Tremendous Trees, Openlands Project, 220 South State, Suite 1880, Chicago, IL 60604. Golf Courses do have some of the largest trees located on them due to the general conditions surrounding them. Go out and scout your property and nominate those large trees.

Dale Morrison & Joe Reents at Broken Arrow report that their new maintenance shop is near completion. But as it seems in most cases, a fight with "city hall" is slowing things down.

In the December issue of *The Bull Sheet* I had wondered where big Oak Golf Club was in the article of old newsletters. Well, Henry Michna and Pete Hahn both called and said that the club was located across the street from Ridgemoor C.C. and was developed back in the early '50s. Thanks guys.

*Golf Magazine* has named the top 100 courses in the U.S. and the top 100 courses in the world. Chicagoland has a few listed:

100 Greatest in the U.S. in 1995:  
#1 Pine Valley, Clementon, NJ (1918)

(continued on page 20)



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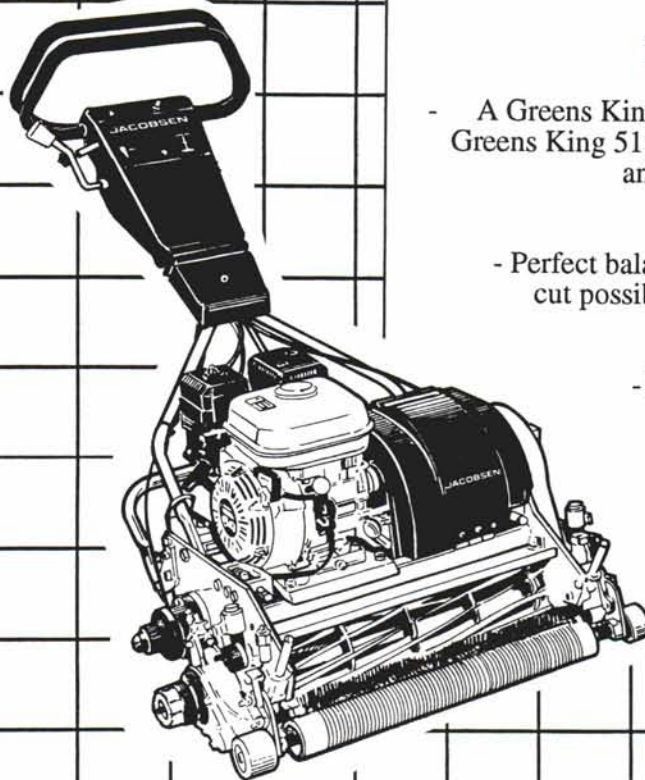


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# A SUMMER TO REMEMBER

By Ray Schmitz

Years from now, the summer of 1995 will be one that will be much discussed because of the terrible heat and humidity in the Midwest part of the United States. It will be mentioned along with the summer of 1955 which some of the "older superintendents" still talk about.

The problem of high summer temperatures was compounded by a wet, cool spring which didn't allow for the grass plants to develop a good dense root system and carbohydrate storage in the plant. As we all know, these factors are critical to the grass plant to defend itself from the normal stresses of summer, i.e., heat, humidity, disease, traffic, etc. We went from unfavorable springtime conditions right into the summer heat, and later the heat and humidity, and in some places in the Chicago area, untimely heavy rainfall.

At Flossmoor Country Club, starting around the 1st of August, the turf was under stress but held up pretty well. Fortunately, we missed the heavy rains that caused damage to courses on the North Side and downstate courses from Decatur to Danville. I kept saying that if weather conditions don't change, we are going to start seeing turf decline mainly on the fairways. In the meantime, we were spraying on a preventative basis, but the spray intervals were becoming very short. When you read the label of a fungicide, and it says that you can expect 14 day control; it did not happen. All thoughts about IPM went out the window. We were in the midst of a battle!

On August 9, the 30th Glenwood Pro Am Tournament was held at our club and was very

successful. We received many favorable comments from the 42 visiting golf professionals who played the course. In the meantime, the heat and humidity continued. On August 11, which was a Friday, at one o'clock in the afternoon, I could see that I had lost the battle and there was little anyone could do, especially on the fairways to keep the turf from "going out." Instead of blanket spraying for disease, we reverted to spot spraying of known trouble areas, mainly to save money on our already stressed operating budget.

On August 19, two members on my green committee expressed their concern about the course, and I decided I would write a letter to the membership explaining what happened to the course, why it happened, and what I was going to do about it. The next day, I had my letter sent to the members. In addition, I wrote a nine-point outline explaining an approach to repair the damage which would be started immediately.

We keep hearing about the value of communication, and this was a good example. Let the golfers know that you are aware of the situation, that you did your best to keep the damage at a minimal level and offer a solution with a timetable. At a time like this, it is important to stay positive and not lose your cool. After receiving the letter I issued, many of our members came up and thanked me for the update. From that point on, I was getting waves and smiles instead of stares and frowns from the members, not all, of course, but from the overwhelming majority.

The 3rd week in August, we continued to spray greens and tees, now on a curative basis. I discontinued to spray fairways

because I felt that the sprays were ineffective, and I would rather spend money on an improved variety of seed at this point than spray fungicides that were not doing the job.

Near the end of August, the temperature finally started to cool down, and I started to seed the stress spots in the fairways in an attempt to get the course back to acceptable playing conditions as soon as possible. Our target date was September 23, when we were hosting the three-day Big Ten Girls Invitational Golf Tournament. The tournament was a big success, and the girls loved the course, and most played very well. The seeding that I had done earlier had filled in most of the dead spots that had occurred in the fairways.

A total of 350 pounds of bent grass seed was applied to the fairways, including a small amount applied to thin spots on greens and tees. Only 100 pounds of bluegrass was seeded, and this was slit into the intermediate cut of rough bordering the fairways, which was damaged by summer patch. The rest of the bluegrass in the rough came through the summer in pretty good shape, except for some crabgrass patches here and there. I felt that the key to my success in overseeding was that I applied the seed before Labor Day. All that was needed was a good rain which didn't come until October, so the new seeding had to be watered by means of the irrigation system. The new seeding was fertilized with a high phosphorous fertilizer, which I felt was important for the development of the new grass plants.

What have I learned from the turf grass damage I had last summer? First of all, at the first

*(continued on page 24)*



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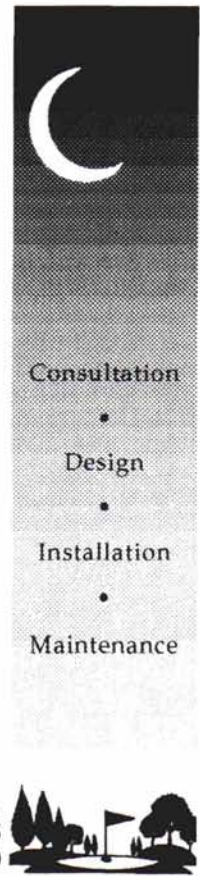
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**the Bull Sheet**

*(continued from page 14)*

- #23 Chicago Golf Club, Wheaton, IL (1895)
- #27 Medinah Country Club #3, Medinah, IL (1928)
- #63 Shoreacres Golf Club, Lake Bluff, IL (1919)
- #64 Butler National, Oak Brook, IL (1974)
- #96 Olympia Fields North Course, Olympia fields, IL (1922)

100 Greatest Courses in the World in 1995

- #1 Pine Valley, Clementon, NJ (1918)
- #41 Chicago Golf Club, Wheaton, IL (1895)
- #46 Medinah Country Club #3, Medinah, IL (1928)

“On Course” received a nice note from Cindy Smith, the daughter of Ken Zanzig. Cindy wants to thank all of you, on behalf of her father, who sent cards and notes to Ken. Ken has Parkinson’s disease and Cindy went on to say how he has finally accepted it and is no longer embarrassed about it when around people. That alone has made it easier for him in getting by day to day. Thanks guys for not forgetting.

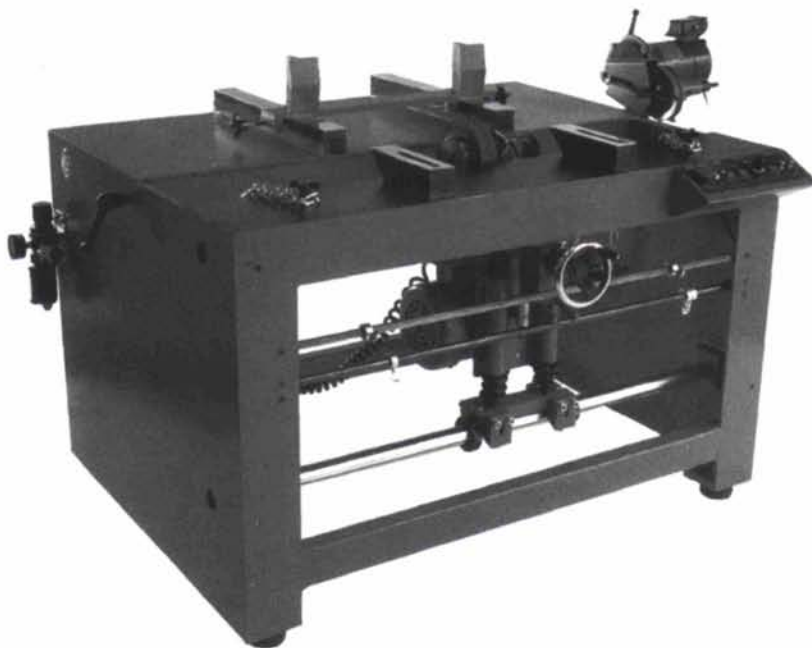
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