



INSTITUTE OF FOOD AND  
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FLORIDA  
COOPERATIVE  
EXTENSION SERVICE

# GOLF TURF NEWS

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## *Growing Turf in the Dry Season*

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The dry season in Florida occurs during the winter and spring. It is roughly the time spanning from the conclusion of one hurricane season in mid-November until the next hurricane season begins mid-June. On an average during these seven months only one-third of the yearly rainfall occurs. There are three periods during the dry season with which a turf manager has to deal: (1) the end of the wet season, (2) the cool, dry winter, and (3) the hot, dry, spring. Each of these periods has unique challenges for the golf course superintendent.

The beginning period of the dry season is a transition period when the turf goes from a predominantly wet state from frequent rainfall to a dry state that requires irrigation. It is a time when many disease problems occur because of repeated wetting and drying of the thatch which causes fungal spores to form and spread. Helminthosporium often is a problem at the beginning of the dry season. The turf disorder, Bermudagrass Decline, also begins to appear. It is a time when many of the other problems previously masked by frequent rain appear, especially poor root systems caused by nematodes, diseases, or improper management.

The beginning of the dry season is the time to complete preparations for the winter golfing season. Fall fertilization programs should have been completed as well as nematode control so that the turf can have as good a root system as possible going into the dry season. Overseeding should be completed during the month of November.

The middle period of the dry season is characterized by relatively little rainfall and cool to cold temperatures. The bermudagrass growth has stopped in north Florida and slowed in south Florida. Overseeding has become established. Generally there are a few major problems occurring, although isolated attacks by various insects and diseases can occur on overseeded grasses. Pythium and other root rots can cause severe damage if weather is warmer and wetter than normal. Because of slow bermudagrass growth, traffic can result in major damage if not

properly directed to cart paths or roughs. Any turf damage during the middle of the dry season will take a long time to heal over.

A major cultural problem that begins to appear during the middle of the dry season are localized dry spots. These are caused by hydrophobic soil conditions which have developed as soil dried out.

Dry spots are very difficult to rewet by regular irrigation. Best solution to eliminate these spots is a non-ionic wetting agent. Use these materials at labelled rates and soak the dry areas. Exceeding wetting agent label rates and frequencies can cause a yellowing of the turf. Never use laundry detergent as a turf wetting agent! While these detergents are good for cleaning clothes they will cause serious turf damage.

The end period of the dry season is hot and dry. It is the time of spring transition when bermudagrass becomes active again. Irrigation demands are at their highest as active growth and warm temperatures combine to produce high evapotranspiration rates. Mole crickets activity returns with a vengeance and many other insect pests need to be controlled to prevent serious turf damage. Aerification and other cultivation practices can be implemented during this time because the rapid growing grass will quickly cover the disrupted areas.

In all, the dry season in Florida is a time of varied activities and challenges on the golf course. The severity of deviation from the average monthly rainfall and temperatures often determine the success or failure of a turf management program. However, careful implementation of fertilizer and irrigation practices can be extremely efficient and produce excellent turf during the dry season. ■

NOTICE: Anyone wishing to take the G.C.S.A.A. certification or recertification exams, Bruce Augustin is available in south Florida and Charles Peacock is available in north Florida to proctor the tests. Superintendents should contact the national G.C.S.A.A. office regarding details.