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JUMP START HIGH TRAFFIC AREAS

By Todd Lowe

Golf cart and other vehicle traffic has taken its toll on bermudagrass health over the past few months and has created a ragged appearance in high traffic areas. Bermudagrass growth decreases significantly when nighttime temperatures drop below 50 degrees F and eventually ceases to grow at all. Florida golf courses receive most of their play at this time, and continual traffic removes green turfgrass

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leaves and exposes the tan-colored underlying stems. The soil in high traffic areas also becomes compacted, and this further reduces turfgrass root growth and oxygen uptake.

Although there continue to be a few cold nights, a gradual temperature increase over the past few weeks has caused the bermudagrass to green up throughout the region. Golf course roughs have been especially responsive to increased soil temperatures, and are maintaining better color and overall quality. Now that sustained bermudagrass growth and recovery can take place, several cultural practices are recommended to improve turf quality.

High traffic areas will benefit from soil cultivation practices at this time. Deep slicing or solid-tine aeration are particularly beneficial, as they cause less surface disruption than hollow-tine aeration, while relieving soil compaction.

Increased fertilization will also improve turf recovery. Most nutrient reserves have been depleted, and the turf must convert stored energy from its roots to create new green leaves. Like a bear coming out of hibernation, the turf is hungry, and feeding it at this time will significantly improve turf quality.

Peak winter season play will continue over the next couple of months, but increasing soil temperatures will help sustain better turf quality. Give your turf a little jump start at this time, with supplemental soil cultivation to relieve compaction, and fertilization to feed the grass. ■



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