

Spring Prep: There are few rules, if any

By MICHAEL LEVANS

If there were one universal spring preparation rule that could be neatly stitched and framed to hang in the maintenance shed office it would probably read, "Do your fall work."

Other than that, no rules apply when it comes to getting a course up and running for the new season. Mother Nature takes over and your left to deal with the rites of spring — field mice making winter homes in sod-wall bunkers and irrigation boxes, deer damage, elk dung, frost heaves and those pesky early-season players.

"Everybody gets spring fever," said Terry Buchen, an agronomic consultant. "Then they watch The Masters and everybody goes nuts and wants to get on the course before it's ready."

"Our single biggest spring-prep problem is keeping the golfers off the course until the frost thaws out," said Gerry Faubel, superintendent at Saginaw Country Club in Saginaw, Mich. "They can play when it's frozen, but when the frost is coming out of the ground it's imperative that they stay off."

Faubel said he's posted signs around the course, but that's never enough to keep the golf-hungry at bay.

"It's so easy for strangers to just park on the street and jump on, so we have to keep an eye out and politely ask them to leave."

Smaller springtime pests come in the form of voles for Kevin Ross, superintendent at the Country Club of the Rockies in Vail, Colo. The voles gnaw away at the grass under snow cover, which results in tiny piles of wet grass clippings after the thaw.

"They gnaw it down, cut it so short that we have to reseed or refertilize in those spots," said Ross. "It's our biggest problem." But Ross comes back at the little creatures with a safe, homespun remedy which has yet to fail him.

"We spray hot pepper sauce on the grass to make the grass pungent, a little less appetizing," said Ross.

Ross starts his spring prep during the first week in April and aims to open the first week in May, after the elk dung has been shoveled and hauled away, of course.

Let's not forget the field mice. Buchen said he has seen many a topnotch irrigation system go down due to mice turning irrigation controller boxes into winter retreats.

"They eat the insulation off the wires," said Buchen. "Supers can put rat and mice poison in irrigation controllers, but that's about all you can do."

Moisture is Gary Laliberte's greatest springtime foe.

For Laliberte, superintendent at Prout's Neck Country Club, Scarborough, Maine, it's water, water everywhere on the 3rd and 16th fairways, which are both at sea level.

"Those two fairways are under 2 feet of water every spring," he said. "We have to pump for a couple weeks to get it completely

out and there's nothing we can do about it."

And if the rodents, dung and flooding isn't enough to keep you busy, there's always the basic spring clean up — branches, leaves, etc.

"You can nip a lot of clean up in the bud in the fall," said Faubel.

Spring prep: New challenges in N.D.

By BOB SPIWAK

GRAND FORKS & FARGO, N.D. — When the Red River flooded to a record 54 feet last spring, the golf courses along its banks in Grand Forks and Fargo were inundated. This year, spring prep promises to be a little less complicated for

the courses that were ravaged by the silt and mud deposited by the raging waters.

Three of the courses contacted, Lincoln Park and the Country Club at Grand Forks, and Edgewood CC in Fargo plan to open on schedule this

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