

# MYTH

By Jason Stahl

**Our panel of experts sets the record straight on popular myths and misconceptions in golf turf maintenance.**

**E**very industry has them – popular beliefs that have no basis in fact but are spread around eagerly with an air of certainty. Who knows where they start? A conference, a blog, the corner tavern? While they may be popular, most if not all are false.

Same goes for the golf turf world. In asking industry experts what the most common misconceptions are, they came up with no shortage of famous untruths covering cultivation practices, insect control and other topics.

**BUSTIN'**

## MYTH #1

**Warm winters mean more bugs, cold winters mean less.**

**VERDICT:** False.

**R**ick Brandenburg, professor of entomology at North Carolina State University, says this is simply not true.

"Nature has a way of balancing itself," he says. "You could say since it was warmer that they survived, but so did a lot of their natural enemies. I don't care if you're in south Georgia or southern Canada, you can't assume that you will have more bugs if you have a warm winter."

First, Brandenburg says a warm winter in Canada doesn't compare to even a cold winter in south Georgia.

"White grubs such as Japanese and oriental beetles live in both Canada and South Carolina, so insects have incredible adaptability," Brandenburg says.







## MYTH #2

Microbes need to be added to improve soil.

**VERDICT:** False.

“The microbial community in turfgrass soils is plentiful and diverse,” Pat Gross, USGA Green Section Southwest Region director, says. “Additions do not improve soil conditions in any significant way. The microbial community is mostly influenced by moisture, air porosity, temperature and nitrogen content.”

## MYTH #3

Golf courses play better when green.

**VERDICT:** False.

From a golfer’s perspective, they believe courses are better when they’re green. Larry W. Gilhuly, USGA Green Section Northwest Region director, defiantly says, “No, they are not.”

“They’re not as healthy and don’t play as good from a pure playing standpoint. Green courses don’t play nearly as good as courses with a little more firmness to them. And that would be the North America vs. Great Britain or Scotland approach.”

The result, says Gilhuly, is that superintendents are caught in the crosshairs. “The vast majority of superintendents would back off if allowed, but golfers dictate in North America.”

## MYTH #4

Vertical mowing makes greens faster.

**VERDICT:** False.

Also from the golfer’s perspective is the idea that vertical mowing will make greens slicker. But Gross says the opposite is actually true.

“It temporarily slows them down for a couple days,” he says.

Gross says it goes like this: members are always asking what the club down the street is doing, and when they hear the superintendent is vertical mowing, all of a sudden they think their own superintendent isn’t vertical mowing enough.

“And they’re completely oblivious to what the practice really achieves and why it’s done,” says Gross.

## MYTH #5

Applying a little extra water is always better.

**VERDICT:** Usually False.

This is not always true, says Gross, unless the course uses recycled water and must manage salinity.

“This attitude results in a waste of water along with soft, wet playing conditions,” he says.

Gilhuly concurs, saying a lot of people believe this but the top superintendents do not. “But they’re forced into it by people who think golf should be green.”





## MYTH #6

Your pest problems will always stay the same.

**VERDICT: False.**

Brandenburg believes there is the perception out there that the pest problems you've had for 20 years will continue to be the same problems you have in the future. And that's simply not correct, he says.

"If you look at the diseases and weed issues we've dealt with over the last 20 to 30 years, those have changed, partially because products we use and our cultural practices have changed. The same certainly holds true for insects on a golf course. As we change how we do business and the products we use, we see shifts away from some problems to others."

The best example, Brandenburg says, is 30 years ago when he started his career in the southeast and people were concerned about sod webworms.

"The reality is I haven't seen a sod webworm problem in 20 years in North Carolina. But 30 to 40 years ago, people had problems with them."

Brandenburg stresses that a problem that you've historically had that eventually subsides isn't necessarily an indicator that you've done something wrong; instead, it's a reflection of changes in production and cultural practices.

"Insect problems do change over time, not overnight but over 20 to 30 years," he says.

## MYTH #7

We don't have to worry about insects developing resistance to products we use.

**VERDICT: False.**

"Historically, we have seen it with certain products that were used so much that soils contained many microorganisms that would break it down very quickly and it wouldn't work," says Brandenburg.

The idea of "Well, it's working so let's use it again and again," has been proven to be a bad strategy in, for example, the northeastern U.S. with the annual bluegrass weevil.

"Being on a golf course setting where we think insects come and go all the time, resistance is an issue that superintendents need to be concerned about because it can and does happen."



## MYTH #8

Rolling greens will compact the soil.

**VERDICT: False.**

Gross says that's simply not the case. And there is a lot of research validating that, whether it's on native soil or sand greens.

Gilhuly agrees, saying he runs into that all the time.

"All the research shows it doesn't compact the soil at all but just wears the leaf blade off," he says. "So if the turf starts to go on the edges, it's because of wear and not because of compaction."

Gilhuly cited the 2010 U.S. Senior Open in Washington where the superintendent thought he could firm up the approach by rolling it six times. Gilhuly then tested it with a Tru-Firm and found that it didn't change at all.

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## MYTH #9

**We only have to solid-tine aerate.**

**VERDICT: False.**

**U**SGA Green Section Mid-Continent Region director Bud White says no-no-no to the thinking that all superintendents need to do is solid-tine aerate.

In fact, a popular mistake is that solid-tine equipment is actually aerating equipment. A solid-tine spike penetrates the soil and moves it to its sides, creating a more compact, denser soil. Aeration removes plugs of soil and grass from the turf, allowing avenues for water, oxygen and nutrients all while alleviating soil compaction.

"Some guys will use solid tines for aeration instead of pulling cores, and while that's a great supplement, it does not replace pulling a core all the time," he says. "You have to pull a core out occasionally to relieve compaction."

### FOR MORE INFO...

For more information on this topic, check out the USGA Green Section Record's article "Long-term aeration," which outlines an in depth study comparing the impact of hollow- and solid-tine aeration on bentgrass fairways. Enter [bit.ly/1dPOgHT](http://bit.ly/1dPOgHT) into your browser to access the article.

## MYTH #10

**Today's new products are so environmentally friendly that we don't have to worry about how we use them.**

**VERDICT: False.**

"All we need to do is look at some of the public press on insecticides and bee kills and realize that, while it's a fact that products in our industry are more environmentally friendly than they used to be, we can't just blow off any concern for how we use them," Brandenburg says.

Brandenburg believes many view some of the products they put down as water because their toxicity is so low, especially the neonicotinoid insecticides that have been associated with bee kills.

"It's not necessarily because something was done improperly with them, but these products are still not benign when it comes to off-target effects. Just because they have lower toxicity doesn't mean they're absolutely benign."

## MYTH #11

**A drainage system under a green has to be vented.**

**VERDICT: False.**

Apparently, some believe that the drainage tile system under a green has to be vented in order to prevent swamp gasses from building up and causing problems with turf growth. Nothing could be further than the truth, White says.

"Nothing in soil can be that air tight where you have to put vents on the ends of your drainage system." **GCI**

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