

# Hot Weather Approach Means Wilt Is Coming Back

*But Hudson Valley greenmaster says it can be headed off if vigilance and proper maintenance practices are followed*

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**M**ANY persons are of the opinion that wilt is the No. 1 killer of bent grass. Yet, very little has been written about it. A recently published book on golf course turf devotes only two paragraphs (210 words, by my count) to it. Older publications don't mention it at all.

From my observations in the Hudson valley, wilt is something that has crept in on us, obtained a foothold and perhaps become more severe with the passing years. It is not a disease, although a disease may accompany it. It occurs when moisture in the grass blades evaporates faster than the roots can absorb it from the soil. It reveals itself in patchy slate-blue areas that readily show footprints and lack the normal luster of healthy turf.

## Studied Temperature, Wind

As far as I can tell, wilt must have come upon us very gradually. I first noticed in the early '50s when I was at Duchess G & CC in Poughkeepsie, N. Y. I learned to forecast its appearance or coming by temps. and winds — temps. in the 90s and winds out of the south. It seemed to develop slowly and if no water was applied, the night dew would pull the turf through another day. Gradually, no wind and more moderate temperatures seemed to bring it on. And, if water wasn't applied, damage resulted.

But don't be deceived. Wilt doesn't always appear in this slow-gaining form. At one course in our area it appeared during a three-day holiday, was allowed to go unchecked because of heavy play, and it took until fall to bring the turf back.

Along with hot, dry wilt, I noticed that the affliction resulted during periods of high humidity. The basic trouble, caused by either kind of weather condition, is due to the tendency of bent grass to become shallow rooted in the summertime. The stunted roots can't absorb enough moisture to compensate for that lost by the blades. We have tried everything we have

ever heard of to develop long, healthy roots and keep them. They are fine in the spring, but long, white active roots are nonexistent in plugs cut in August. It seems to be their nature to dissipate during the warm months. Thus, wilt is more severe in late August and is caused by only moderately hot and humid weather.

## Supt. More Active

As roots and turf become less active, the supt. should become more active. Since the greens are the backbone of the course, they should receive the most attention during the hot months, even if this means neglecting other important jobs.

Light watering is the only thing that will stop wilt once it has started. A light watering right after lunch early in the summer, and a second one later on, say at three or four o'clock, in August, will usually keep the greens free of trouble. It is a good idea to school all your employees in recognizing wilt so that you can be tipped off whenever it seems to be appearing on any green. And, too, the work schedules of your men should be arranged so that all can be thrown into the battle against it immediately after it appears. I prefer to have two, and, if possible, three men ready to act as hosemen during August when wilt is predominant. If only one man is available it is an uphill, and can be a losing struggle, to get him around to water each green for 10 minutes or so when the affliction is at its peak. It isn't a bad idea, either, to school your green chmn. on the possible ravages of wilt and what has to be done to prevent it.

I start looking for wilt quite early in the summer, particularly if we've had warm weather. Mid-afternoon inspection should show any evidence of it. It's a good idea to start the 10-minute hand watering program early if you are the least suspicious of its onset. As the season goes on, the inspection is pushed up to mid-morning or just before lunch. Appearance of it in the morning means that syringing should take place twice a day, around lunchtime and again at about 2:30 or 3



Working up enthusiasm for the Combined Jewish Appeal tournament, involving 1,000 members of six Chicago area clubs, played on June 28, were these pros (l to r): Jack Koennecker, Twin Orchard; Huck Florence, Idlewild; Stan Kertes, Bryn Mawr; and Herb Minert, Ravisloe. This foursome, along with Joe Zelazny of Briarwood and Red Dennison of Green Acres, set up ground rules for the tourney which preceded fund raising dinners held at the six clubs.

p.m. A few years ago I hesitated to water after an application of fungicide, but with improved materials this precaution probably no longer is necessary, especially if the spray has dried on the leaf. For example, I have sprayed a green that had active brownpatch, returned 20 minutes later and watered with a sprinkler for as long as an hour or even a few hours. On the following day the brownpatch was clearing up, meaning that control was practically perfect in spite of the watering.

#### Weekend Labor Problem

The weekend labor problem figures strongly in the control of wilt. Or, at least, it does in our section of the country. But every effort should be made to have a man available on Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays, especially during the hot months, for syringing purposes. I have used retired men and caddies when necessary to handle the job. It is important that members and the green committee understand the weekend problem. If your regular crew is on a five-day week, the maintenance staff usually works short-handed on weekends. It thus becomes necessary to add that extra help on weekends to take care of the wilt threat, especially during July and August and even in Sept. Wilt, it should be stressed, doesn't take any weekend holidays.

Without going too far into overall greens maintenance, there are a few things that I think should be observed in reducing the possibility of wilt. Here they are:

#### Easy on Nitrogen

Don't use too much nitrogen during the playing season. An overabundance of food makes the turf too delicate and lush in extreme hot weather and it becomes a prey to wilt. I aim to keep the putting surfaces green in July and Aug., yet a bit

on the hungry side. If greens seem to be off color, I recommend small applications of iron sulfate about every week or 10 days. Besides going easy on fertilizers during the hot weeks, I suggest sticking very close to the recommended rates for fungicides during this period.

I don't recommend topdressing during July and Aug. Otherwise, I topdress four times a year with a 1-1-1 mix of loam, sand and humus with the idea of providing a cushion to offset the vibration of powermowers.

#### Around the Green

Another practice that helps to minimize wilt is to water the area surrounding the green. The presence of moisture in aprons, collars, traps and the close-in fairway area keeps the entire area cooler and wilt doesn't have quite as much of a chance to take hold. By the same token, wetting agents should be considered as an adjunct to the cooling effect of the water and also because they undoubtedly help to strengthen the grass roots.

Severe mat or thatch aggravate wilt because roots aren't kept in contact with the true soil. Anything that cuts down on mat or thatch — brushing, raking, spiking, slicing, verticutting, etc., is going to help solve the wilt problem. Whether these operations should be carried out during hot weather is another matter. I shy away from everything but spiking in June or July, figuring that the other operations should be carried out only when the weather is cool.

#### Raise the Mower?

If you can get away with it, a slightly higher cut should help you get through August without wilt decimating your greens. But I don't recommend skipping  
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wintertime. Ten extra maintenance employees were added to the regular Olympia Fields staff after the course had been closed for the season to make the changes. In addition to helping out in reconstructing the course, the extra workers have repaired and strengthened bridges and repaired or built shelters.

### Scene of Four Big Ones

Olympia Fields has been the scene of the 1925 PGA Championship, the 1928 National Open, the 1927 and 1933 Western Opens and several other ranking tournaments. Walter Hagen won the 1925 PGA and returned in 1927 to capture the Western. The 1928 USGA Open was won by Johnny Farrell in a playoff with Bob Jones. The 1933 Western went to Macdonald Smith who shot a 282. The North course's competitive single round record is owned by Lawson Little who shot a 65 in qualifying for the 1940 National Open.

Chuck Tanis, Olympia Field's veteran pro, thinks that the 1961 PGA will be won by the professional who can play long, well positioned shots from the tees, go boldly for the pins with his irons and not be afraid to roll his putts to the back of the cups.

The North course was known as No. 4 in the original scheme of things at Olympia. It was designed by Willie Park, Jr., who is said to have laid out more golf courses than any man who ever lived. It was put into play in 1923.

### Wilt Is Coming Back

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any cuttings. I have noticed that if rain keeps us from mowing for a couple days during August, the bent seems to suffer a slight shock when cutting is resumed. Normally, we cut at 1/4 in. six days a week, skipping Monday. Last year we went to 5/16 in. from mid-Aug. through mid-Sept., but I'm not yet completely sure if this is the answer. At least, it is a thought.

Some fellows I know feel that pre-dawn watering gives the greens a better chance of coming through the day in good shape. There probably is merit in this, but I wouldn't depend on it as total protection. If I were to do this, I'd still want to give my greens a check every two hours between mid-morning and mid-afternoon.