



## PREPARING FOR

# The Big Chill

Superintendent offers tips to control winter damage

BY DALE MORRISON

**T**here are many products superintendents can use to prevent winter damage to turf. But sometimes having too many options is confusing. From antitranspirations to keep-it-green products to covers that breathe and covers that don't breathe, a superintendent must find the right combination to keep his grass protected. This takes trial and error, luck and sometimes even some magic.

The most important aspect of putting the grass to bed is to make sure it's as healthy as possible before winter strikes. I accomplish this by applying fertilizers and fungicides, aerating and reducing water in the fall, which forces roots to reach deep for moisture and in turn helps to protect them from freezing temperatures.

Second, I keep my winterizing procedure simple. Here it is in a nutshell:

**Greens:** The way I put my greens to bed is to first apply a fungicide combination to the greens using more than 100 gallons of water per acre. I spray each nine with a different combination in order to see the difference in spring greenup. I apply the fungicides at the highest rate along with 4 ounces of iron per 1,000 square feet. I apply 1.5 pounds of nitrogen from organic fertilizers after spraying, along with other granular applications of a nutrient product. Finally, I cover everything except the tips of the plant with topdressing, which usually results in a smooth, true-green surface in the spring. However, if I notice a delay in greenup in the spring, I go in and remove excess sand with power brooms. But the sand usually gets worked in from winter and spring rains.

**Tees:** I apply a dormant fertilizer application that has a high potassium and phosphorus base. I spray a bactericide with iron. I only topdress tees that are exposed to the elements.

**Fairways:** I apply 1 pound of nitrogen in mid-August. Then I aerate, spike and drag the fairways with a flex drag. I then apply another pound of nitrogen in mid-to-late October when the soil temperatures are below 50 degrees Fahrenheit. I apply pentachloronitrobenzene (PCNB) in mid-November with 4 ounces to 5 ounces of iron in the mix. All grasses are mowed at summer heights one last time before the PCNB application is made.

**Other notes:** There's a good chance the course will have snow cover because I live in central Wisconsin. That's good, because the snow can insulate the turf. Still, while there are sections of the course that are snow-covered for more than 60 days, there are other sections that aren't covered and have no protection from the wind.

Also, I don't shovel snow off any greens because heavy equipment on the course can cause more damage than leaving the snow lie.

The best way to prevent winter damage is to keep the maintenance simple. Also, having confidence in a crew that I can count on no matter what winter provides gives me peace of mind.

**I almost forgot:** If all my scientific preparation fails to protect the grass and lessen winter damage, I have a back-up plan — it's called the Magic Bone. Found on the property many moons ago, this deer jawbone hangs above the pump station and has a bird's-eye view of the entire course. Sanctified by the crew and decorated with several turkey feathers, the Magic Bone watches over each blade of grass, keeping the ruthless turf reaper at bay. ■

*Morrison is certified superintendent of Trappers Turn Golf Club, a 27-hole public course in Wisconsin Dells, Wis.*