



The turf problems that appear in summer such as anthracnose are usually preventable in the spring. According to several superintendents, April is the month to determine a proper course of action.

Pest Control Turns at April Crossroads

Superintendents will find out soon enough what to expect from weeds, disease and insects in 2005

By Thomas Skernivitz
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SHAKESPEARE wrote about the “uncertain glory of an April day.” Unfortunately for superintendents, there are 30 of those unpredictable days, which creates a lot more indecision than glory when it comes to picking the best spring pesticide strategies.

With winter at its midway point, superintendents are waiting and wondering how to guarantee a summer free of weeds, disease and insects. Unfortunately, that anticipation often lasts through a telltale April.

“That month of April is real critical — whether it’s going to be wet or a little bit on the dry side,” Jeff Corcoran says from Rochester, N.Y., where he is the superintendent of Oak Hill Country Club.

From the other side of the nation, Sandy Clark concurs. “I know we start looking at soil tem-

peratures in about April for some of the summer problems,” the certified superintendent of Barona Creek Golf Club in Lakeside, Calif., says.

Hot or cold? Wet or dry? With little more direction than a short-range weather forecast — April Fool’s jokes can be just as reliable — who’s to know?

“I’ll always assume for the worst weather,” says James Bade, the superintendent at Somerset Country Club in St. Paul, Minn.

By necessity, others are a little more trustworthy. “We just make sure we’re really on top of what the weather is going to do,” Corcoran says. “We see what the forecast looks like for the next seven to 14 days.”

Warm temperatures and dry weather usually discourage pests and lessen the need for preventive measures months in advance. But

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Pest Control Leads to April Crossroads



JASON NABB/SHUTTERSTOCK

“Dollar spot has become the beast to control, particularly on bentgrass.”

STEVE MERKEL

Brown patch is more severe when turf is cut too low.



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precipitation and cold promote pests, meaning any delay to take a curative stance could, by summer, be too little too late.

“In the springtime we’re pretty much more on a curative basis,” Corcoran says. “If it’s wet and cool and nasty and I know that anthracnose can be around the corner, and if we’re aerifying at that particular time, then I might do something more on a preventive basis. But for the most part, it is curative.”

‘Beastly’ turf diseases

Several superintendents cite anthracnose as a primary concern. Other diseases mentioned are fusarium patch, pink snow mold, dollar spot and gray leaf spot.

“If you’re trying to prevent something like anthracnose or the leaf spot diseases, you better do some preventive things up front,” Clark says, “because once anthracnose takes hold, curative (measures are) very, very difficult.”

Bade uses a preventive approach with anthracnose — he’s enjoyed success with Heritage and plans on also using Insignia this spring — but he takes a less aggressive philosophy against leaf spot and other conditions.

“I don’t worry about disease as much as maybe some other guys in the spring,” he says. “We can get leaf spot pretty bad, but usually I’ll ride it out. Pink snow mold can be a problem; that’s a little more serious. We get it in the spring if it’s wet and cloudy. But if it’s going to be sunny and dry, I’ll just let that one ride, too.”



Insects such as billbugs (above) often warrant curative treatment methods, although in the case of Japanese beetles, it’s best to deploy a preventive strategy.

Gray leaf spot, according to Clark, is now on the radar screen in Southern California.

“It seems to have grown a little bit each year. One of our very highly rated private clubs out here has seen it in the summer in kikuyugrass. We know we’ve seen it in the fall and spring in perennial ryegrass. So, obviously, that’s a concern,” Clark says. “And that could become an issue from a cost standpoint because of the amount of ryegrass overseeding we do out here. There may be some courses that start deciding not to overseed because once you start treating 50 or 60 acres, that’s a healthy expense.”

Steve Merkel, the manager of golf course agronomy at Landscapes Golf Group in Lincoln, Neb., called dollar spot the “beast of turf disease.”

“We’re seeing that stuff active earlier in the year in cooler temperatures and also later in the year in cooler temperatures,” he says. “Dollar spot has become the beast to control, particularly on bentgrass, specifically in the western half of the Midwest and mid-Atlantic.”

As for his favorite pesticides, Merkel says: “I really like the way the new pesticides have gone lately with the ultra-low usage rates and the longer residual, particularly for fungicides. But if I had a dream product right now, it would be a fungicide that lasted longer and cost less. That would be a real Santa Claus wish for me.”

Weeds (and Poa) not wanted

Crabgrass remains a common problem — one with varied treatment philosophies.

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MARY CORCORAN



"We start thinking about crabgrass control in the springtime."

JEFF CORCORAN

Successful superintendents and their staffs not only treat turf diseases such as dollar spot in a prompt fashion, they document their history.



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"We start thinking about crabgrass control in the springtime," Corcoran says.

Meanwhile, Bade applies his treatment in the late fall or early winter, "so that saves me one application in the spring."

Luckily for Clark, localized weeds are as bad as it gets for him in the San Diego area. His biggest worry is stunting *Poa annua* growth.

"I don't think anyone does a whole lot of complete wall-to-wall stuff other than some crabgrass prevention," he says. "And that's not uncommon out here. That's probably a February to March application of either Dimension, Barricade or any other pendimethalin product."

Merkel, who tends to courses across much of the country, says the transition zone in the north is "very concerned" about *Poa annua*. In the South and Midwest, they're focused on crabgrass, goosegrass and annual summer weeds, he adds.

Book on bugs

Curative methods, particularly against cutworms and webworms, appear prevalent among the superintendents interviewed.

"We are pretty much a cutworm and webworm environment with a little bit of *ataenius*, but *ataenius* is becoming more widespread throughout the county," Clark says. "For most of us, we can get away with a June application of Merit and not have to apply

anything the remainder of the season."

"Our biggest one is the cutworm so far," Bade adds. "Usually I'll wait to see signs of it coming. Then I'll go out and cure the problem. Its lifecycle seems to vary a lot."

Corcoran and Merkel touted Merit and Mach II as also being successful curative agents against grubs. "But I don't think anything is the silver bullet," Corcoran notes.

Preventive measures should be taken against another insect. "The one to worry about is the Japanese beetle," Bade says. "We haven't had that problem, but it's something you need to keep an eye out for because once you get 'em, I guess they're pretty bad. Damage starts showing up later in the year, but by then it's too late. The guys who know they have trouble with it are preventing it in the spring."

As for budget concerns, Bade saw his allowance increase from \$60,000 to \$65,000 this year. "Some guys are higher, some guys are less," he says.

Corcoran, meanwhile, doesn't worry about controlling costs as much as pests. "To be real honest, our No. 1 goal is the plant and turf health. And I don't necessarily let the numbers get in the way of that," he says. "More important than the budgetary concern is the communication concern. If you're looking like you're having a tough spring from a disease or pest standpoint, just get the word out to your board or your green chairman that, 'Hey, look, we're running into these issues and they can't go untreated just because we can't spend X amount of dollars.'"

Besides the weather, record-keeping and experience are emphasized in the battle against pests. "I've been at this course 15 years, so I rely on familiarity," Bade says. "I knew dollar spot used to show up every year around Memorial Day and June 1. So now I'll fertilize and/or spray beforehand to keep it from coming in at all."

Merkel credits talented, consistent staffs that keep good records.

"I know guys that have their fairways all drawn out on pages and they mark where they've made treatments, particularly on grubs, on a given year," he says, "and then the next year those are the areas that they try to make the preventive summer treatment for grubs." ■