

I've got to tell you: I think one of the coolest things about being a superintendent is the experience gained from the passage of time. Year after year goes by, and if you're fortunate enough to be at the same club for a number of years, you begin to assimilate the workings of the local heartbeat of the land.

You get a feel for the local climate and can anticipate when things are going to happen on your course. For instance, when you can blend current weather situations with historical data and forecast information along with the knowledge of your own club's microclimate, then you can anticipate a pest or disease outbreak at your club that might not happen at a neighboring club just 5 miles down the road.

Being at a somewhat rural public golf course has some other certain advantages when it comes to diagnosing a pest outbreak. For example: How many of you country club people know that damaging insect larvae activity is greatest after a full moon on a Friday before the weekend of the member-guest tournament?

Or that if an insect spray isn't applied right before or right after aerification in spring or fall, the cutworms will take up residence in what Kevin Mathias, turfgrass professor at the Institute of Applied Agriculture at the University of Maryland, calls "cutworm hotels" or the aerification holes you've conveniently punched for them?

If you're armed with these kinds of time-tested facts, you can keep turf bugs at bay.

Another method that public golf course superintendents have to employ is the "tolerance elevation" method. We must use this method in place of the zero-tolerance-spray-pests-at-will method.

Let me just ask you this: How well do you tolerate what's bugging you and your golf course? I know my threshold tolerance was less than zero when I started out. If I saw one shady area in the rough begin to show signs of dollar spot, I high-tailed it to the sprayer. Same with insect activity. One little mysterious hole in a green and it was Tempo time.

But like a fine wine, I've mellowed with age. My tolerance levels have elevated while my blood pressure has dropped. Now I'm able to wait and watch, taking in all the factors of

A Hunch and a Pest Outbreak

BY JIM BLACK



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this current pest outbreak. This way I can spray because I should, not just because I can. I've found that by waiting a little longer and accepting just a little more infestation, I get more bugs for the buck. Then I can eliminate a spray or two during the season.

And when it comes to disease outbreaks, I've learned that sometimes — if the weather is about to change for the better — diseases go away on their own.

But I'll say this: Bugs have their own agendas, and superintendents have to do what they do when they need to do it — regardless of the weather.

In my neck of the woods, we have to wait until August to find out just how effective the spring preventive application was in deterring pests. Little by little the crows will either see the ground moving or hear the sickening chewing of the roots. Regardless of how they know, they sharpen their beaks and dig in. And they tear out chunks of turf for a chance at a tasty white grub. Their destruction can be swift and widespread, causing much tension between yourself and the head pro.

So now who is the pest? The grub or the crow? But you can't spray for crows. Just imagine the public outcry.

Then there's the marshall who packs his trusty pellet gun in a blanket (for discretion, of course). He can be seen hiding behind trees and around corners, waiting for the opportunity to take a clear shot at a crow without drawing too much attention to himself.

So now who is the pest? The grub, the crow or the marshall?

Just remember, proper pest diagnosis will be key for another successful year.

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