

# 'Heated'

## Conversation

Superintendents discuss strategies to battle summer stress

Compiled by  
Larry Aylward

Hot fun in the summertime? Don't sing that tune to superintendents tending cool-season turf. The "hot" isn't fun in the "summertime" when you're battling Mother Nature's sweltering heat to protect your greens, tees and fairways from stress-related factors. So we asked superintendents: **What are the two most important things you do to avoid summer stress on turf?**

“One of the biggest tools I use to avoid summer stress on my turf is to apply wetting agents on my 24 acres of annual bluegrass/bentgrass fairways. With a single-row irrigation system, I need to keep my soil hydrated at all times, day in and day out to prevent stress. The best product I have used to keep my soil moist is a wetting agent.

“Another practice we do to relieve stress on the golf course is to remove the buckets on our walking greens mowers before we make our clean-up passes. Even though my staff members were trained to empty the buckets before they made the clean-up passes, not everyone did. So now everyone just removes the bucket (which, with a full load of clippings and dew, can weight up to 16 pounds) before they mow the clean-up pass.”

— **Steve Hammon**, Superintendent  
Traverse City (Mich.) Golf & Country Club

“The first thing I do, going by results from off-season soil testing, is improve my soils to condition them to grow the best and healthiest turf possible. If my soils are in reasonably good condition, my turf stands the best chance of surviving. Second, and maybe more important, is using the plant growth regulator Primo. I cannot imagine managing turf without it.”

— **Charlie Fultz**, Superintendent  
Shenvalee Golf Resort  
New Market, Va.

“When we run into summer stress times, the two biggest things we focus on are raising mowing heights and using an organic biomix to condition the soil and root-zone. Raising the mowing height is the obvious. I stumbled on the other [tactic] during our integrated pest management (IPM) work.



I knew that 90 percent of the problems were occurring in the soil during those stress months. So I put a mix together of a wetting agent, an amino acid feeder and a biological turf food. Basically, it was like giving turf a vitamin shot to help it fight off a cold before it arrives. While it's not a cure, it has reduced the stress enough where turf is not lost."

— **Patrick Blum**, Superintendent  
Colonial Acres Golf Course  
Glenmont, N.Y.

“Normandie Golf Club was built in 1901, and the course still has the same push-up greens. The greens also have a thatch layer about 2 inches thick. My plan is to aerify with a walk-behind aerifier with half-inch quadrates in March. I've found this is the fastest way to remove layering. In April I'll change to quarter-inch tines and aerify again in May and possibly June. I'll aerify again with quarter-inch quads in September and then with half-inch quads in October.

"Watering these greens shouldn't be too hard this summer even though they contain 70 percent to 80 percent *Poa annua*. I hand-water lightly and frequently in the afternoons daily for about eight to 10 weeks. I won't use a long-term wetting agent but I will use a turf penetrant for flushing and getting the moisture down past any layering that could occur. It's very important to monitor moisture content in the soil profile as well as the weather. I like to keep the greens a little on the dry side. You can always add water but you can't take it away."

— **Kent Critchell**, Superintendent  
Normandie Golf Club  
St. Louis

“For this season, I plan to continue one tried-and-true turf stress reliever and implement a new plan that I've learned a lot about the past year. Because we are a *Poa annua*/bentgrass golf course with more of the latter than the former, we strive to maintain *Poa annua* and keep it alive through summer stress periods. We have been very pleased with the results we have achieved on fairways and tees with biweekly potassium phosphite fertilizer applications beginning in mid-June and continuing through mid-August.

"Our new stress management plan for our greens is based on the findings of Thomas Nikolai from Michigan State University. We will first establish the ideal speed range for our membership, and then employ a combination of cultural practices, which will allow us to consistently attain that speed without unduly stressing the turf. Instead of relying on simply lowering the mowing height, we plan to increase the frequency of rolling, light sand topdressing, vertical mowing and grooming, double mowing, and plant growth regulator applications (to name a few) to reach our goal."

— **John Gurke**, Certified Superintendent  
Aurora (Ill.) Country Club

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