

# Clark Talks Turf

■ TIMELY TURF ADVICE



## → It's Time for a Checkup

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**W**hile the calendar says February, the weather says March or April. This means it is time to start monitoring the health of your turf. A good place to begin is to record and graph the daily high and low air temperatures. Seeing is believing and the trends that you can see on the graph are much more useful than daily air temperatures from a table or a list. And if you are like me, it is hard to remember the temperatures from two days ago, let alone a week ago.

A graph tells you all you need to know with a quick glance. If you want to make your graph more useful, add the 30-year average high and low air temperatures to the graph. Recording and graphing the soil temperature at a two-inch depth is also helpful information. This graph will provide a great reference when you begin to decide when to implement various management practices.

Overseeded golf courses should be hitting their peak in terms of playing condition and golfer traffic. Right now, temperatures are nearly ideal for overseeded cool season grasses. Light, frequent nitrogen fertilization of all overseeded areas is essential to encourage a moderate amount of leaf growth so the grass can cope with traffic. Adding iron to the nitrogen fertilizer application is a good way to enhance color without stimulating

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excess growth. Be sure to keep an eye on cart traffic in congested areas and on par 3 holes. Even though the grass is growing well, concentrated traffic can wear out the overseeded turf and, once worn out, it will be difficult to get that area to recover this season.

Non-overseeded golf courses in the South and in the transition zone are experiencing great weather for golfers, but not great weather for growing warm season grasses. Warm season grasses perform their best when air temperatures are consistently in the range of 80 to 95° F. While there are some green leaves in the canopy, the temperatures are not warm enough to stimulate growth.

Use a gentle approach to all management practices this time of year. And manage traffic carefully. Dormant or semi-dormant warm season grasses can easily be worn out by traffic this time of year, which will slow green-up and recovery later in the spring.

In northern locations, due to a mild winter, cool season grasses may be partially green but they certainly aren't growing. Cool season grasses perform their best when air temperatures are consistently in the range of 60 to 75° F. While the weather is warm for February, it isn't warm enough for cool season grasses to sustain growth. Avoid the temptation to start your management programs until the air temperatures are consistently above 60° F. Manage the traffic carefully, and if you feel the need to be outside, focus your attention on trimming trees and cleaning up the golf course.

If you are concerned about the grass surviving winter, don't hesitate to bring several plugs indoors and place them in a well-lit window and watch what happens. Within a week, the grass should show definite signs of life if it survived the winter.

Record the daily high and low air temperatures all season long. It is a good habit. You can also use the same graph to note various events, such as first mowing of the year, first sign of brown ring patch and first observation of annual bluegrass weevil. This simple graph will soon become your most trusted resource when managing your golf course.

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