



## **THE DOG DAYS**

*By Monroe S. Miller*

It happens every year — summer arrives too soon and lasts too long. For some reason I foolishly put the thought of just how difficult they are completely out of my mind during the rest of the year. It's probably some sort of psychological defense mechanism — no person in his right mind could think of summers past and their attending frustrations on the golf course and still be a Golf Course Superintendent. A lot of my friends and neighbors think that it is really weird that I have such a distaste for the months of July and August. To them, summer life is easier and they enjoy the abundant heat. Summer is a good friend to them; for us it is too often an enemy. They have their highest level of good feeling in the summertime; I am a real grouch on many of the days of summer. For them, summer is vacation time; when did any of you last take a summertime vacation with your family? It is swimming and picnic and camping time for them. It is their season of flowers and gardens. It is a time of baseball, softball and golf. It is a week in Door County, a weekend at Great America or a weekend at Wisconsin Dells. For us summer is a time of too much work, too much tension and too much worry. It is, in fact, anything but the "good ol' summertime." It is a period of abnormal existence, not only for us but for our families as well. And I cannot pretend that I like it all that much.

I did a little reading to try to find out why the hot days of late summer are called the "dog days of August." I guess I had never given it much thought before, and I just assumed they were so called because I always feel like most dogs look on hot days — tongue hanging out, panting and hoping to make it until sunset. It seems that the real meaning of the phrase comes from the Dog Star, Canicula. Back in Roman times the

dog days ran from early July until the second week of August. That was a miserable season for them, a time when ponds stagnated, snakes went blind and dogs went mad. Star gazers, searching the sky for answers to the seasonal misery, found that Canicula was at that time in conjunction with the sun. There wasn't anything that could be done about the movement of the stars, so they simply said Canicula was to blame and urged Romans to make sacrifices to the star and to beware of the mad dogs. The gradual movement of the stars has shifted the dates of Canicula's conjunction, and now the dog days come in late July and August. My speculation on the origin was off the mark because the Romans were not as straight forward and basic in their derivations. I more readily relate to the American Indian name for the month of August — the month of the "Red Moon."

Summer days are so extreme on the golf course. Heat waves build and move in quickly and they stay for several days. The best we can hope for in July and August is a one-night respite of cool rain. Then another heat wave gathers force, sets in and looks for a golf course to victimize. How can anyone enjoy that?

There is really a more fundamental reason why I do not get very excited about summer, a reason that goes beyond the frustration and nervousness that hot days bring to all Golf Course Superintendents. It is something that I see in many of you, something that I sense when we visit at our summer meetings or during telephone conversations many of us have over the intervening days. Summer, especially those really difficult and trying ones, saps and drains off too much of the fierce energy of Golf Course Superintendents. I almost resent it. The unbounded enthusiasm that is manifest in energy directed toward and into our golf courses fades; a lot of our brashness is taken from us, leaving us somewhat different people than we are the rest of the year. The redemption is that in mid-August, as we begin the downhill side of summer, I see it returning in others and in myself. Fortunately we

seem to recover quickly from the blinding ordeal that summers can be for us.

Maybe the secret to a more tolerable summer is learning to enjoy certain times and special features of the season. There is no doubt that a tough summer heightens our appreciation for the other seasons. Even winter doesn't seem quite so bad when it follows one of those summers that comes close to "doing in" a Golf Course Superintendent's golf course. For as long as I can remember I've always loved rain — farm fields need showers every bit as much as golf courses do — and when we go for two or three weeks, or more, without a good soaking shower, the one that finally parks over Madison isn't appreciated any more by anyone in the city than it is by me. I've also discovered a deep need for cloudy days and the shade they bring. Shade is a lifesaver for a host of animals, including man. It can really be a lifesaver for a Golf Course Superintendent and for the grass on his golf course. It is demonstrated by the fact that we wear hats, open the door and stay inside the house on a hot day, sit under a tree for a few moments or have canopies on our equipment. We are making use of both natural and man-made shade. I can remember driving to one of our monthly meetings last year. The sun was blazing down as I drove along a stretch of highway. A large moving shadow from a drifting cloud overtook the truck and I felt immediate relief and comfort. I stepped on the gas a little bit and for about ten miles I was able to ride under the awning that cloud provided. It sure was nice, and I am not at all certain that it would have occurred to me to try to stay under it if I didn't suffer in the summer heat and have the resulting love for shade. And I know for sure that I wouldn't have experienced the sense of a sudden lessening of the pressure of the midsummer heat if my daily work at this time of year wasn't so strongly influenced by the summer.

Yes, July and August are tough months.

September cannot come soon enough.