



# A Cold, Dry and Windy Spring in Wisconsin

By Monroe S. Miller

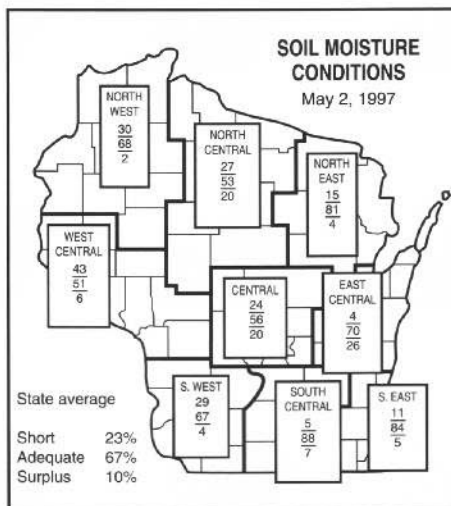
An early Memorial Day weekend seemed to exaggerate what everyone associated with our club was feeling - COLD! The early holiday had been preceded by an early opening. In Madison, Wisconsin the lilacs always have blossomed and passed by Memorial day, along with the flowering crabapple trees. Tulips and other spring bulbs are long gone and the deciduous trees are leafed out at their fullest.

Not in 1997. Tulips were still in full bloom, *Poa annua* hadn't seriously started seeding, no fungicides had been sprayed and honey locust trees were just pushing leaves from their buds. Winter injury, where it did occur, was still evident. In our town, the temperature dropped to 27 degrees F.—a record—on May 17th. And two days earlier there was scattered snow mixed with rain. An unusually strong jet stream spent the spring pulling cold Canadian air into our fair (and normally warmer) state.

There would have been more griping from my corner except for the fact it was dry, which set this year apart from last year when it was cold and wet. This year we were able to do a lot of work in the spring unencumbered by either mud or golf players. It came close to being a fair trade.

March, April and May were very windy months. Those three months had 34 days with wind gusts of at least 25 mph. Adding to the evidence is the statistic that only two days saw wind gusts of LESS than 15 mph. It was so windy that our normally busy five lakes in the Madison area were pretty lonely. And those strong winds made golf almost impossible on some days.

Wisconsin is considered a four season state, but many years, including this one, we leap from a long winter into summer. There were only four—70 degree F. days in our town in May; temperatures were below normal 25 days of the 31 in May. My hunch is that we'll once again begin hearing

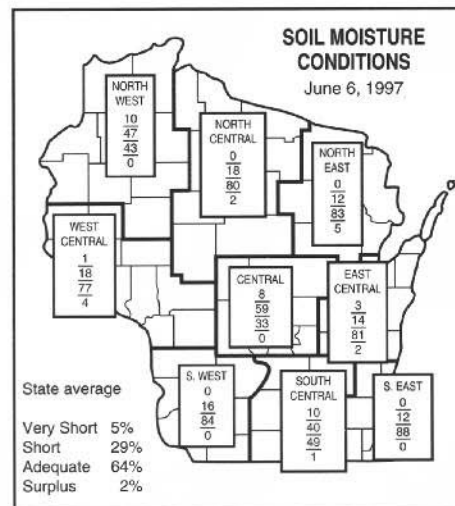


about El Nino, the cause of a lot of our weird weather.

Wisconsin Agricultural Statistics Service data are included here to confirm what you already know from your own experiences this spring.

It finally rained significantly in town on May 29th. It had been dry and the soil soaked up every drop.

As happens very often, you could almost "smell" the rain coming. Many



times I've been told that this pleasant, fresh odor was ozone. The theory was that ozone molecules were carried to the earth with the drops of rain and gave the air the distinctive aroma most people who work outdoors know about.

I checked the theory out and even though it sounds good and makes sense, it isn't factual. One simple piece of evidence is that most of the earth's ozone is above any rain clouds. Also, ozone is odorless unless



it is burned! There goes a perfectly believable theory down the drain.

In fact, what we smell as rain approaches us are oils that have been given off by plants and absorbed in the soil where they blend with the "earthy" aroma of the soil. These oils (and their smells) are released into the air when the relative humidity hits 80%. And often times when the R.H. is that high, it rains, making our connection between smells and rains an easy one.

The walking tours at SENTRY-WORLD were terrific. It has been a while since I have visited that beautiful facility in central Wisconsin, making the visit even more fun. The day was beautiful and warm, Gray Tanko and the SENTRY staff were wonderful to us, and there was a lot to learn. To all of them, a heartfelt thanks.

The only downside was the somewhat low attendance. The first Monday in June is an aerification day on many golf courses in Wisconsin and many of the WGCSA members

were committed and couldn't attend. It was their loss.

I want to extend my compliments to the arrangements committee for including an event like this one for the second consecutive year. It adds greatly to the overall program offered to our members, moving a step closer to "something for everybody."

Dr. Frank Rossi was in town on Sunday, May 18. He flew into Green Bay to stand up in Scott Sann's wedding on the 17th, drove to Madison to meet with Emily Buelow and discuss her M.S. thesis the next day and stopped by our house before he left late afternoon for business in Chicago on Monday.

He's still a busy man—tons of speaking engagements all over the country in the past year, travel associated with the USGA research committee, and turf extension duties in New York State. Covering the bases in New York alone is a big job because it is a big, big state. Look at a map sometime to see how far it is from Buffalo to the tip of Long Island.

Then there is the matter of getting a program of his own started at a new institution. And students, both undergrads and grads. And writing assignments.

In the midst of all his activity is family and farm and those responsibilities, which are most important to him.

It is a good thing he is a high energy guy.

Among many golf course superintendents least favorite things to do is dealing with the press. One is never sure how an article will be written, and we tend to fear the worst.

No wonder. Often times in the past that is what happened to us. To a lesser degree, it happened to me this spring. After spending time with a reporter from one of the city newspapers, I was quoted (accurately, at least) only once and the serious matters I discussed with the reporter were not even mentioned. He had his article written long before he sat and talked with me on my golf course on a spring afternoon.

I believe we are all better prepared to deal with the changing times and inquiries made of us get answered

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Gary Tanko explains his design to Dave Smith and Sheri Bay.



The planting crews were hard at work on the flower hole, No. 16 at SENTRYWORLD.

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straight away. But the slanted stories, misquotes, out of context quotes, articles meant to convict golf course (or at least indict them) still happen. But we now see stories like the one that appeared in the Saturday, April 12, 1997 *Sheboygan Free Press*.

A reporter spent a fair amount of time talking with Michael Lee and other staff at Blackwolf Run. The result was a fair, balanced, close-to-the-truth article I was proud to read. Rod Johnson was also interviewed and his experience came through in the words of the reporter.

So, a good story about golf courses, wildlife, pesticide issues and fertilizer use can happen—if we are prepared for it. And if the reporter is unbiased. Congrats to Mick.

A sad note to report: Tom Mascaro passed away on May 6, 1997 at Pompano Beach, Florida. Tom was 81.

Few ever have or ever will match this man's creative talent in the golf course industry. He invented the aerifier for cultivating turfgrass and the vertical mower for thatch removal. Both were revolutionary machines.

For his contributions, Tom was given the USGA Green Section

Award and the GCSAA Distinguished Service Award, among hundreds of others.

It was probably ten years ago that I had the privilege of a visit from Tom Mascaro at our golf course. He was working with Helmut Adam of Ransomes, Inc. in Johnson Creek on the vertidrain. He was intrigued by my collection of toy tractors, and a month after his visit I received an old toy tractor from him in the mail. I still have it.

Tom was quite a guy and he will be missed by thousands in our business.

Looking to 'soup up' your 68" National mower or LF-100 or John Deere LGT? If you are you need to order a video produced by a Clinton, Wisconsin guy. Mark Madson's video is titled, "How To Build a Pro Street Lawn Mower." It costs \$29.95 and runs two hours in length. He's sold over 500 so far and the video was chosen on one of the 20 best of 1996 by *Outdoor Power Equipment* magazine.

The average cost for implementing the video is only \$200—that doesn't include your labor. And it will move down the road (or fairway) at a breathtaking 40 mph.

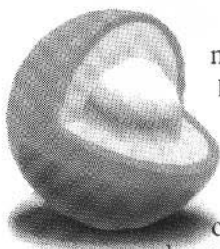
There's only one problem, however. When completed, it won't cut grass!

From the "Is This A Great Country Or What?" department: Let's see; you cannot fly a B-52 bomber if you commit adultery. You cannot serve as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff if you commit adultery. But you can be president!

I don't care much about what the summer solstice says about summer beginning or end. In Wisconsin, summer is June, July and August. Evidence was with us on May 31st—our first warm 80 degree F. day. Weather stats actually show the three warmest months begin on about June 7, so we were pretty close in 1997. The longest day will have passed when this issue hits the newsstand and the shorter days with longer nights are here. The march to winter has begun!

Regardless, these summer days for golf course superintendents are hard work days and seem to stretch out forever and forever. My wish is they will be rewarding and satisfying, filled with many successes. Adiós until next time. 🌱

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