



MIDSEASON UPDATE

By Bob Vavrek, Agronomist
USGA Green Section

As expected, the unusual weather patterns this season have had a considerable influence on the condition of turf at golf courses across the Region. The direct and indirect effects of a mild winter, little frost development in the soil, and warm temperatures in March are still apparent well into summer.

Relatively little winterkill to *Poa annua* occurred last winter compared to more severe and extensive losses of turf in 1996 and 1997. There was, however, a fair amount of snow mold activity this spring, which persisted into June on several courses. Consequently, the pressure from golfers to accelerate the recovery process was intense if you were one of the unfortunate few who experienced significant winter injury. No surprise here — courses that utilized temporary green recovered much faster than courses where golfers chose or demanded to play the damaged greens. Strange how the golfers' tune changes in July and August when the putting surfaces are still extremely thin and bumpy.

A bumper crop of weeds may also be an indirect effect of the mild winter weather and early spring. Clover, dandelions, and plantain on fairways/roughs, along with chickweed in greens have been especially troublesome. Even crabgrass has made a comeback this summer. Everyone seems to favor Confront for clover control, and to be honest; the 1-pint rate really performs well in Kentucky bluegrass roughs. However, consider this formula I developed after a half dozen visits to concerned superintendents this season:

Confront + Bentgrass Fairways + Heat Stress = Crispy Turf + Grumpy Golfers

Many superintendents also believe that the playing surfaces have more *Poa annua* this year, perhaps due to the high survival rate of *Poa* over the winter. As a result there has been a considerable amount of Turf Enhancer and Primo being used to knock that darn new *Poa* out of the greens. At the same time, the superintendents at courses that experienced winterkill can't wait for that wonderful, beautiful *Poa* to fill into those thin spots on greens and thus avoid potential unemployment.

Many of the Weeping Willows and Silver Maples that were overplanted on many golf courses after American Elms were decimated by Dutch Elm disease were toppled over by high winds this summer. Some huge uprooted willows were only 30 years old, much to the surprise of golfers who firmly believe the trees were there and an integral part of the layout, back in the 20's when Donald Ross designed the course. Hopefully, golfers will realize that trees are not a permanent golf course feature. Renovating a fairway bunker is much easier than replacing a mature tree that "makes" the hole.

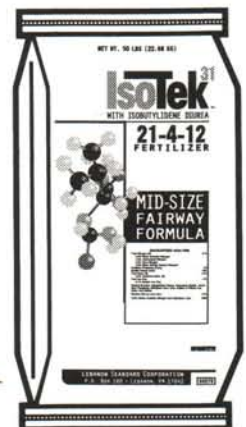
Who knows, maybe the damage to trees on many courses will result in more thoughtful long range planning for the future. Maybe more money can be allocated for maintaining the trees already on the course, instead of simply adding more and more trees to the layout. Maybe high quality native trees, such as Burr Oaks and White Oaks, could be carefully blended into the design of the course instead of overplanting with fast growing shallow rooted species such as Cottonwoods and Willows and Silver Maples. Maybe a little open space on the course is good. Maybe I'll break 80 this year, too!

Heavy early season play has taken its toll on the superintendents and maintenance staff at many courses visited this summer — Memorial Day seemed like the 4th of July and the 4th of July seemed like Labor Day. What effects the heavy play will have on the condition of greens and fairways by the end of the season remains to be seen. One thing for sure — Labor Day will seem like Christmas Eve. 🍷

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