

USGA

Forever Spring?

By Bob Vavrek, USGA Green Section Agronomist, North Central Region

It's mid-June and courses across the north-central tier of states have only seen a day or two over 80 degrees. Nighttime temperatures seem to have stabilized in the mid to upper 40's with a few early June frosts thrown in for good measure. For every sunny warm day, there followed a week of cool, cloudy weather. Not exactly what the doctor ordered, if you were hoping for early warm weather to accelerate recovery from winter desiccation injury.

You would be hard pressed to find a course completely unaffected by some form of winterkill. Turf in elevated exposed sites suffered the most. Many tees and bunker banks renovated with sod last October and November needed to be re-sodded this spring. The history of the weak, thin turf seen on courses this spring often dates back to the losses of *Poa annua* that happened during the hot, stressful weather last summer.

Turf died, never recovered before winter, and then was further damaged by prolonged periods of frigid temperatures and little, if any, snow cover. How cold was it? Cemetery workers in northern Minnesota reported 7 to 8 feet of frost in ground by late winter.

Localized areas of the Region experienced severe crown hydration winterkill to *Poa annua* following an early April ice storm that also damaged many trees. True to form, the injury occurred in the poorly drained, low areas on greens and fairways where water tends to puddle after rain or when snow and ice melts.

In general, greens that were aerated late last fall experienced more severe winterkill than greens aerated during early September. In fact, if you used large diameter tines last October, there are probably still partially open holes in greens even if the extra effort was made to completely fill the holes with topdressing. There is a

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school of thought that coring greens late in the season and leaving the holes fully open over the winter will give water from melting ice or snow a place to go and, in effect, minimize the potential for crown hydration injury. Maybe so...maybe not; however, you might be held back a year if you attended that school last fall.

At a number of courses, more damage was seen along the spray overlaps where last November's fungicide applications were made, especially where PCNB was used. When the weather is extremely uncooperative, it seems like every turf management decision made on the course ends up making the problem worse.

No shortage of weeds in fairways and roughs either. Turf growing at a snail's pace has little ability to compete with clover or dandelions. The effects of herbicide applications have been inconsistent due to the inability of the weeds to absorb a lethal dose of herbicide.

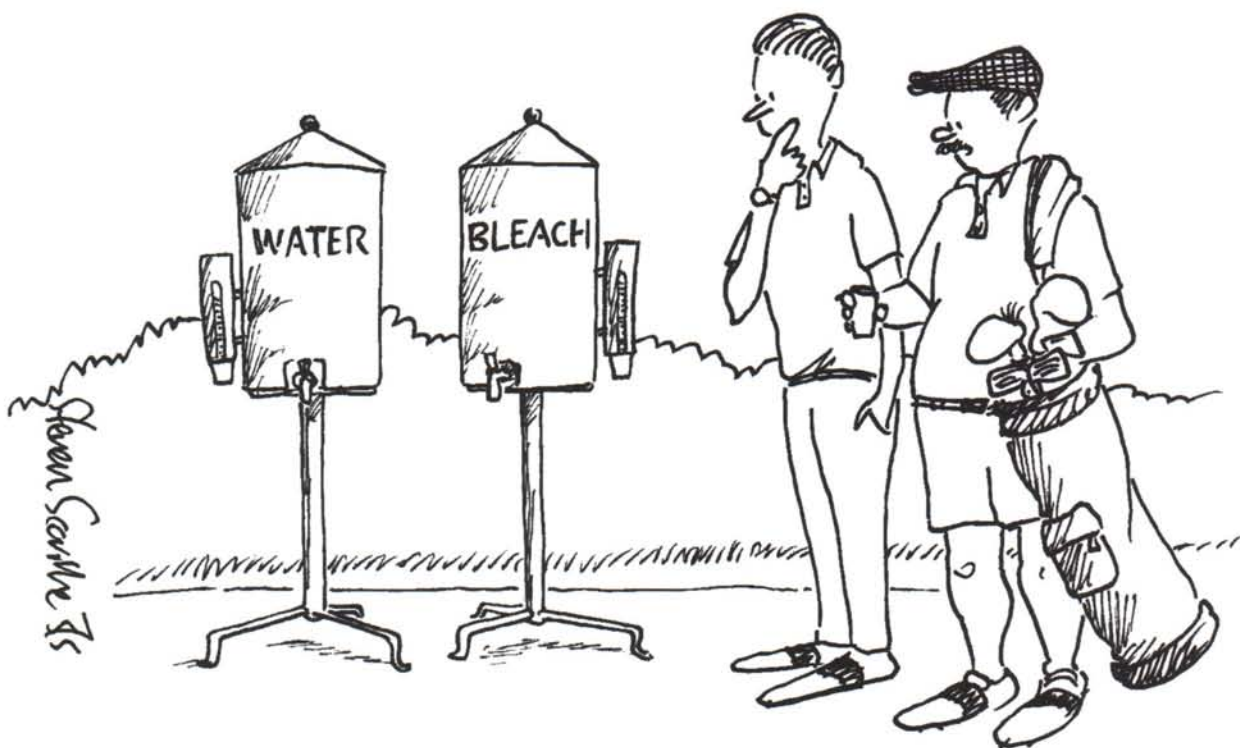
If there is a silver lining in the dark cloud of unfavorable weather it may be the effect on green speed. You know greens are really fast during late May when five or six greens can be mowed before baskets need to be emptied.

Unfortunately, a considerable amount of nitrogen has already been applied to turf in hope of encouraging

some growth and recovery. Who knows what kind of growth surge will occur when hot, humid weather finally arrives? The effect of the cool weather on *Poa annua* seedhead development is unclear as well. Many superintendents claim excellent control from a variety of chemical suppression techniques. But has the real flush of seedhead development even occurred yet? The speed golfers enjoy now may be difficult to maintain once temperatures reach the mid-to-upper 80's.

On a positive note, some courses will return to a more sensible schedule of core cultivation this fall. The schedule of late-season events will be modified to accommodate early September aeration operations. The goal of late summer aeration being to provide ample time for open holes to heal over completely before winter.

Perhaps we will be lucky and still experience some transition period before hot, stressful weather arrives. Last summer it seemed like treatments for pink snow mold outbreaks were applied one week and the following week applications were made to prevent Pythium blight. A week or two of temperatures in the low 80's with a warm rain to get the turf moving would definitely make many people happy. ♣



"I THINK THEY HAD TO PUT IT IN FOR HEALTH SAFETY REASONS..."