

Summer...What Summer?

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For some superintendents, it has been a quiet peaceful season, with little, if any, heat stress to turf. Temperatures have rarely reached into the upper 80's and then for only a day or two. Irrigation systems have been used so little at several courses visited recently that the grass has almost completely grown over the sprinklers.

On the other hand, this summer has been very difficult if you happened to be unlucky enough to have experienced significant winterkill on the course. Injury to turf from ice and desiccation has been extremely slow to heal over. Damage in fairways was still evident at many courses well into August, despite several attempts to overseed.

It should come as no surprise that recovery was slowest in sites where concentrated cart traffic causes wear and compaction to the turf. Make every effort to divert cart traffic away from winterkill, with ropes and stakes if necessary, until the playing surfaces heal completely. Start this policy in spring and no exceptions for outing, special events, etc.

As we begin to prepare for next winter, keep in mind that the controversial issue of whether or not to cover greens has not been resolved. Every season a few more types of cover materials hit the market with the usual sales pitch...green up sooner/open sooner and increase revenues, improve turf density during the spring, complete protection from desiccation and crown hydration and so on.

Yet year in and year out, some covers work and others don't. Some years nearly every type of cover seems to help and the next year you're better off without covering greens. The bottom line has not changed very much over the years...covers are simply not the panacea for all the types of winter injury that can occur across the northern tier of states. Under certain conditions they can be beneficial and a good investment, under other conditions they do nothing or possibly cause more harm than good. When all is said and done, a moderately heavy application of sand top-dressing applied uniformly over the greens still provides a fairly good level of protection from desiccation during an open winter.

The cool weather this summer was a blessing in many respects. Cold, exceptionally wet weather during spring limited root growth and most courses entered the summer with weak, shallow root systems. Greens scalped down to increase green speed have typically had the weakest root systems. Most courses

visited are routinely mowing greens at or below an 1/8" and you would be hard pressed to find many roots deeper than an inch. Losses of turf could have been severe if the summer had turned out to be hot and dry.

Just because the summer has been mild is no reason to postpone or skip the important core cultivation operations this fall. Coring the greens, tees, and fairways will help stimulate new root growth and remove some of the excess organic matter that accumulates in the upper root zone of the playing surfaces. Keep in mind that cool, wet weather inhibits the microbes responsible for organic matter decay. Core cultivation with hollow tines will remove some of the organic matter that would have normally been removed by natural decay processes. Excess thatch accumulation can really sneak up on you during a wet, cool season. We will learn much more about the problems associated with excessive organic matter accumulation on November 16th and 17th at the 2004 Wisconsin Symposium.

Dollar spot has gone wild at many courses this summer. Superintendents have often commented that fungicide treatment intervals needed to be shortened significantly due to the ideal weather for disease activity. One day you have control and the next day extensive areas of turf are covered with disease.

A fair amount of take-all patch was observed at a number of courses during June. Old bentgrass/*Poa annua* turf in fairways was affected along with tees sodded with bentgrass a few years ago.

Sod webworms damage to greens has been observed on visits from early spring through summer, though the amount feeding injury was rarely severe enough to warrant an insecticide application. Ants, however, have been particularly troublesome on greens, tees and fairways all summer.

Weeds had little trouble competing with slowly growing turf during April and May. Clover has been a persistent problem and once the weather finally warmed up into the 70's and 80's, a considerable amount of crabgrass germinated across bunker banks and other droughty areas of the course.

Despite these concerns, the summer has been exceptionally kind to turfgrass at most courses. Let's hope for similar good fortune through the rest of the season. ♣