



Augtober

By **Monroe S. Miller**, Golf Course Superintendent, Blackhawk Country Club

The first signs of autumn usually begin in mid-to late August for me. This year, August was actually like October. The outdoor world where I work offers clues impossible to miss - sumac turning from green to red, the wild grapes near the pump station on Lake Mendota are almost all purple, and the Queen Anne's Lace along the railroad tracks next to the shop offers up its wide white flowers.

The days are two hours shorter now, and we see an occasional yellow school bus cross over the Blackhawk bridge. Labor Day, at least for golf course superintendents, signals the onset of autumn, not the autumnal equinox set by the calendar. Shortly after Labor Day we have to start work later because the days are so much shorter, and there is a chill in the morning air. The afternoon sun falls lightly as the golf course crew mows fairways and surrounds and roughs. The grass can still be wet with dew in early afternoon, and soon enough we will worry about cores drying so we can clean up after fairway aeration. Leaf removal will assume more priority than mowing.

Wisconsin is never more beautiful than it is in the fall. And it has arrived again, finally. The best days at work are here.

"Not much of a summer" is a phrase I heard plenty this past couple of months. To players, that means too many golf events were cancelled or too many days were less than fully enjoyable for the game. It means that the hot and humid sunny days they are used to in the summer and love for golf games didn't happen very often

this summer. In other words, we didn't have three months of July like we seem to have most years.

A lot of rain fell this summer. And in our town it was timely and didn't come in flood proportions. A wet summer is a dark summer, and that leads to long periods of gray and gloomy weather. Madison, according to the Wisconsin Climatology Office, had 17 rain days in May, 14 rain days in June, 11 rain days in July, and a dozen in August (which isn't over yet). We haven't had even one 90 degree F day and only a few over 85 degrees F. May, June, July and August all were below normal in temperature; August has been over 5 degrees F. below normal thus far. Moisture status from around the state is here for you to review.

All of a sudden, the global warming discussions have disappeared.

As the old saw goes, "if you couldn't grow grass this summer, you probably should find a different line of work." Even though the weather was perfect for healthy turf, golf is in a depressed time and we didn't need poor golf weather to make things worse.

We can all hope for a warm and beautiful fall, one with golf courses packed with players and weather that will allow us to get our work done. We can assume our seats in Camp Randall or pull up a chair in front of the television and watch the Badgers rack up those victories in another fun football season.

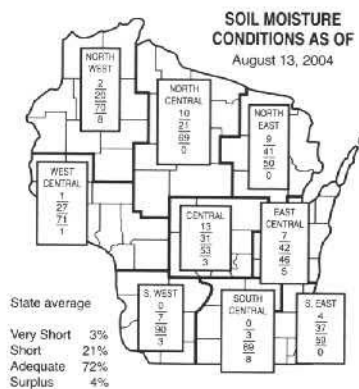
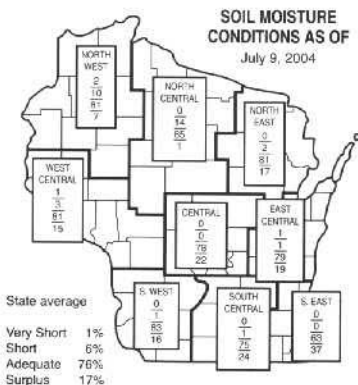
Here is a toast of apple cider to Wisconsin's greatest season.

Not only did the cool temperatures of summer remind one of the upcoming season, early ripening of the foliage of some trees added to the sense of an early autumn.

All over Wisconsin trees were showing fall color about a month earlier than usual. Experts aren't sure why.

We have become used to seeing sugar maples on boulevards and street medians turn color early - it is usually called urban decline. We also know that drought, nutritional deficiencies and diseases can cause trees to turn color prematurely, but those reasons do not seem to apply this year. Face it — this was one of the least stressful summers for plants you will ever see in Wisconsin.

There are some theories trying to explain it through heavy early rains and the very cool summer temperatures.



For me, I will just leave it as one of Mother Nature's mysteries. Golf course superintendents see such mysteries every day. The early color was, if nothing else, a psychological boost and a vivid reminder that my favorite season wasn't far away.

The wet spring that killed so many rounds of golf also killed off tens of millions of gypsy moths, too. The result has been a significant decline in tree defoliation.

The driving wind and rain in May were especially effective. They repeatedly knocked newly hatched caterpillars from trees and shrubs to the ground where they died.

An event like this one breaks the population cycle, and if we are lucky thousands of fewer acres will need to be sprayed next year and some serious money will be saved.

But before you get too excited, remember this: gypsy moths are definitely here in Wisconsin and they are here forever.

No defoliation occurred in Wisconsin again this year even though there were threatening populations in some areas. In addition to the help from the weather, I think we should give considerable credit to WDATCP's spraying program over the past 15 years. It has been extremely effective and helpful.

August was an especially fun month for me, simply because I had some interesting visitors to our shop and golf course. The USGA Green Section had a regional research meeting in town. Jim Snow, national director of the Green Section, and Dr. Kim Erusha, the research director, attended and I was fortunate to spend a bit of time with them. Each is a real gem and being in their company is always a pleasure. Kim and Geunhwa Jung were PhD students at the University of Nebraska - Lincoln together.



Kim Erusha and Jim Snow visited Wisconsin this summer.

Chris Williamson invited Dr. Pat Vittum to visit his earthworm research plots.



Chris Williamson, brought Dr. Pat Vittum from the University of Massachusetts — Amherst out to the course to see his earthworm research. She was a very interesting person to visit with and has made considerable contributions to the field of golf course management.

Golf brings you into contact with so many wonderful people at all levels and in all aspects of the game. It may be one of the best things about a career like we have.

Those of my generation who were students in the UW-Madison turf program undoubtedly took the introductory course in Agronomy taught by Julian M. Sund. I am sad to report that Julian passed away on Monday, August 16th. Pat Sather's wife is a close relative of Julian, and Pat was kind enough to let me know right away.

Julian's life story in many ways was like those of so many in the state. With deep roots in Norwegian heritage, he grew up on a farm near Westby. He attended college at the UW-Madison and stayed on as a faculty member in

the Agronomy Department.

He is best known for figuring out the danger of silage gas that killed so many Wisconsin farmers of his time. The culprit was nitrous oxide, and Julian spent considerable time educating farmers of the danger. He also helped solve the mystery of the spontaneous abortion of many cows in central Wisconsin — nitrates collecting in certain weeds in low, marshland pastures.

J.M. Sund was a positive influence on many students in CALS at the UW-Madison. We meet only a few like him in our lives and they are always missed.

The highlight of 2004 for any of us involved in golf, even remotely, had to have been the PGA Championship at Whistling Straits. It was as close to perfection as one could have hoped for, which clearly was what Mike Lee and Dave Swift and everyone else at the Kohler courses have been working toward for a long time.

Success like that is no accident or lucky break. Their extreme effort put Wisconsin on the map of



Sand bunkers,



Tiger Woods,

Lake Michigan
and...



the 18th hole were
favorite topics of
conversation at
Whistling Straits.

the world of golf. There was so much television press coverage that it seems unnecessary to repeat any of it here. Suffice to say that every Wisconsin golf course superintendent felt a lot of pride that week.



Compliments and high praise are due to Tom Schwab, the UW-Madison turfgrass faculty, the staff at the Noer Facility, and the Wisconsin Turfgrass Association for the simply outstanding Field Day we experienced in late July. The research farm has never looked better, the weather was superb, the Kurth Family Fellowship was introduced, and the chance to kick tires and soak up all kinds of science made it day to remember. If you missed it, you missed a lot. For those there, we won't soon forget it; it was simply terrific.



The autumn season is filled with activities — WGCSA meetings, a couple of fundraisers, and a season wrap up with the Symposium. It is the best time of the year; please enjoy it. ♣

Tom Schwab — a man of many talents — was at the PGA championship with his Irish band. He's quite a fiddler...



Danny Quast and Wayne Otto took time from the PGA and golf to hear Tom Schwab in concert.