

## Winter Damage to Turfgrass in Wisconsin.

By **Bruce Schweiger**, Turfgrass Diagnostic Lab Manager, O.J. Noer Turfgrass Research and Education Facility

*Editors Note: We welcome Mr. Bruce Schweiger as the new manager of the Turfgrass Diagnostic Lab at the O.J. Noer Turfgrass Research and Education Facility.*

As we all know the summer of 2012 was possibly as difficult as we have ever experienced in Wisconsin. Now add to that the winter of 2012-2013 and our turf has suffered. This past winter weather caused damage to the turfgrass throughout the state from golf courses, parks, landscapes and home lawns. Each and every one of us has been bombarded with people looking for answers. Below is a Memorandum that Dr. Paul Koch, Dr. Doug Soldat and I put together and are posting on the TDL website ([tdl.wisc.edu](http://tdl.wisc.edu)). Please feel free to pass this article out or send people to the website to educate them on the turf conditions. I hope this proves to be helpful.

### Severe Damage to turfgrass around the State

The drought of 2012 inflicted major damage to home lawns, golf courses, parks and other turfgrass areas throughout the state of Wisconsin and around the Midwest.


However, severe damage as a result of the stressful winter conditions has also been noted here at the Turfgrass Diagnostic Lab and many turfgrass areas around the state are in need of partial or complete renovation.

Many of the current problems can be traced back to cultural practices conducted last fall. In an attempt to replenish the lawn prior to winter, many homeowners fertilized the lawn using quick release nitrogen fertilizers into late October. This late fall fertilization kept the turfgrass growing long after it should have been going dormant for winter, and prolonged stretches of deep snow cover and thick ice presented exceptionally difficult conditions for turfgrass to survive.

Unfortunately, much of the state's turfgrass could not survive the harsh winter conditions, especially on the heels of such a stressful summer. Fine fescues appear to have taken the brunt of the damage, followed by perennial ryegrass and Kentucky bluegrass. This has left the state with a very high percentage of dead turf. This phenomenon, coupled with the damage from the 2012 drought, has affected all types of

turf; including home lawns, golf courses, athletic fields, and parks. Even experienced golf course superintendents are suffering from significant winter injury.

Our recommendation at the University of Wisconsin for recovery is to renovate using seed or sod, followed by proper cultural practices (i.e. fertilization and irrigation) to re-establish a healthy stand of turfgrass. See UW Extension publication Lawn Renovation and Reestablishment for detailed information on how best to proceed. Unfortunately, seeding turfgrass in the spring has significant challenges compared to seeding in the fall, one of the most significant being weed encroachment in the turfgrass stand. Be prepared to treat any weeds that emerge with a post-emergent herbicide, but be sure to read the herbicide label to ensure adequate weed control with limited harm to the turfgrass. With the delayed spring this year, it is important to establish healthy turfgrass now before the heat and humidity of summer make growing grass much more difficult.

Please don't hesitate to call the Turfgrass Diagnostic Lab with any questions you may have. 



**Turf covers did not protect this golf course green from the long 2013 winter. Damage from repeated freeze and thaws and ice cover are frustrating for staff and golfers.**



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