

Approaching Fall Maintenance/Renovation

By BOB BRAME
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The nights are getting longer and this means soil temperatures are dropping. Cooler soil temperatures point to some needed recovery for those who have experienced turf loss this summer. There has been a wide continuum with regards to the occurrence of hot and wet. Most areas of the region experienced their share of hot, but some stayed much drier than others. As you would expect, the courses that experienced heavier and more frequent rain-fall have suffered the most. This is particularly true when heavy soils and heavy play were added into the mix.

During the last few weeks of travel I've been plagued by the dreaded question, "why are we in such poor condition when the course down the road looks great?" Often the individual asking the question doesn't want to hear that weather, soil type and play volume are the difference, even though it may be the correct answer. The message is simple; learn from the summer's problems, correct the limitations before next season, and don't try to compare your golf course to another course.

The intensity of summer diseases like Pythium and brown patch have softened recently. However, there has been somewhat of a resurgence of dollar spot. Active gray leaf spot disease has been confirmed on a few courses, and those with perennial ryegrass should take protective measures. The surge of fairy ring activity, observed earlier in the season, has completely faded away at most courses.

While the cooler nighttime temperatures will aid in stimulating recovery, closely monitor irrigation needs over the next few weeks. Most courses have shallow roots and generally vulnerable turf, which translates to less tolerance to wilt conditions brought on by higher evapotranspiration rates.

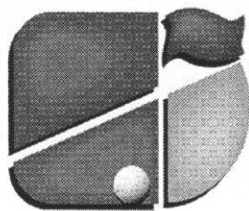
Scout carefully for grub activity. Grub damage was spotted during the third week of August. Feeding grubs, weakened roots, and elevated evapotranspiration rates don't yield a very positive combination. Mole activity continues to be a concern and some would tie this activity to grub populations. The spring-loaded harpoon traps available at lawn and garden supply outlets are being used by courses throughout the region to address the mole population.

Hopefully, aeration was on the calendar at your course for completion last month. Early September aeration in concert with more aggressive feeding sets the stage for recovery and initiate the establishment of a solid foundation for next summer. While aeration has value even in the late fall, timing is important to achieve the best possible combination of benefits. The later aeration is moved into the fall the less opportunity the turf has to recover from this important management process. It seems that pressures increase with each passing year to push aeration work later in the fall, especially on the putting surfaces. Unduly accommodating play can set the stage for problems down the road.

Should specific concerns/questions exist about how to approach fall maintenance/renovation at your course, give us a call (859/356-3272). As previously stated, courses cannot be accurately compared and this means the specifics of a maintenance program need to be custom fitted.

(Editor's Note: Bob Brame may also be reached at bobbrame@usga.org.)

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