

## What does an early spring mean for summer course conditions?

**A**long with the warm weather and greening of the grass comes the excitement experienced by golf course superintendents that the year is ready to begin. Several have mowed greens in April. Late fall/early winter growth probably resulted in the need to remove clippings. Annual bluegrass will normally start growth earlier than bentgrass.

We have had questions about fertilization to encourage early growth. Personally, I would not recommend it if the grass is in good condition. An exception could be where the grass is thin or if snow mold has been active. We could still have a lot of snow mold activity this year, particularly pink snow mold. In my opinion, it is best to let the turf recover naturally and not push it too hard at this time. Heavy nitrogen applications on reasonably healthy turf in spring causes greater growth. Instead of accumulating carbohydrates, the plant grows rapidly. When mowed, the carbohydrates in the leaf tissue are mowed off.

We would prefer to have the plant accu-

mulate those carbohydrates that may be helpful for stress tolerance later, particularly if we should have an early, hot, stressful summer.

Several courses had as many as 200 golfers in two days in late February. Will this be harmful to turf? if the greens are firm and no footprinting occurred, there may have been little damage. Early heavy traffic, when the grass is not growing, could be detrimental. While early play can be great for golfers, there is the question about the long-term injury, depending on the site. Decisions on early play must be based on a site-by-site basis.

*Dr. Paul Rieke, Michigan State University, writing in A Patch of Green.*

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