



*Trying to control weeds and other pests in all areas of a golf course can be tremendously expensive. Superintendents have to prioritize playing surfaces that matter most.*

## THE PURSUIT OF (AFFORDABLE) PERFECTION

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Many people in the golf world believe that “perfect” playing conditions include dense, uniform and weed-free turf. What they may not realize, however, is that the pursuit of such “perfection” can be tremendously expensive. Trying to fully control every pest, regardless of its impact on playability, is simply not affordable for the vast majority of golf facilities. As a result, superintendents focus their pest control efforts on the areas and issues that matter most.

Pests on golf courses come in all shapes and sizes. Some pests, such as turf diseases and nematodes, are microscopic. Others, such as insects and weeds, can be easily identified with the naked eye. Regardless of size, some pests can have a serious impact on playability and must be managed, while others may not be worth the cost or time to control because they have little impact on playability.

When superintendents develop pest management plans, they must balance how problematic a pest can

be with how much it costs to control. Some pests can be very costly to control and, as a result, control efforts must be confined to key areas, such as putting greens. One example of this is nematode control. Some products that control nematodes can cost more than \$3,000 per acre, effectively limiting their use to the relatively small area of the greens. Other pests, such as broadleaf weeds, are relatively simple and affordable to control. Some products that control most broadleaf weeds can cost less than \$1 per acre. Not surprisingly, pests that are more difficult to control are usually more expensive to control.

One of the largest areas that most superintendents treat for pests is fairways. Most golf courses probably have 20-35 acres of fairway turf. Treating such a large area can be expensive, so many superintendents will only apply low-cost products to all fairway areas, while using more expensive products sparingly by making spot applications. As you might imagine, spot spraying is time consuming and small areas can easily be missed while searching for pests across 30 acres of fairway.

In some cases, pests will go untreated if they have a low impact on playability. The rough is a great example of an area where weeds or insects may not be controlled as intensively. By spending less on pest control in the rough, more resources can be focused on the fine turf areas where most golf shots are played from.

So, the next time you are out playing golf and see a dandelion in a bunker face or clover in the rough, remember that resources are being allocated to high-priority areas first to prevent the same, or even more damaging pests from impacting playability in the areas that matter most.