



Green Section Record

REGIONAL UPDATE

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Under the new Rules of Golf, there is no penalty for removing loose impediments like leaves from a bunker, so daily cleanup might not be warranted.

PRIORITIZING LEAF CLEANUP

BY JOHN DANIELS | AGRONOMIST, CENTRAL REGION

A quick transition from warm to cold temperatures in October has resulted in leaves falling so quickly that they seem to cover virtually every square inch of many golf courses. Maintenance teams throughout the country are working feverishly to deal with the mess. The number of hours dedicated to this effort may surprise many golfers. It is not uncommon for an 18-hole course to allocate 40 to 90 labor hours per day to leaf cleanup, and it can take several weeks before the entire process is completed.

Given the large undertaking leaf cleanup presents, some degree of patience and understanding is necessary from golfers. It starts by setting realistic expectations. A goal of 100% leaf removal is expensive and unfeasible. A more reasonable goal is to remove enough leaves to make the course playable and enjoyable. Obviously, priority should be given to the putting greens and tees, where leaves can have a big impact on a golfer's round. Fortunately, their relatively small size makes keeping these areas clean each day manageable for even those courses with modest labor resources. Fairways and rough, however, are much harder to keep clean and some amount of leaf debris should be expected on these areas at this time of year.

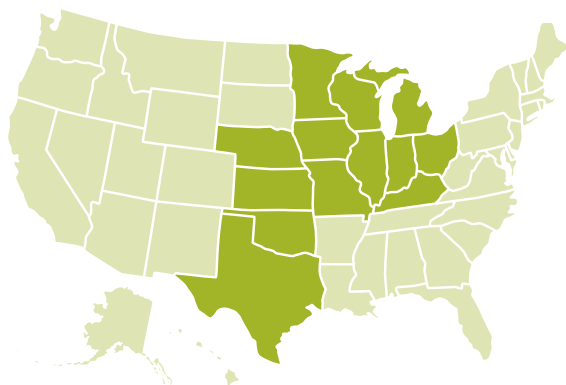
Bunkers are one of the most challenging areas to keep clean during the fall. They are practically leaf magnets. Crews could easily blow bunkers out multiple times per day and still not keep them leaf-free. The good news is keeping these areas perfectly clean is less crucial given the 2019 changes to the Rules of Golf. Under the [new rules](#), golfers are now able to touch and move loose impediments in a bunker. This means that a golfer can touch the sand and get rid of leaves, sticks or stones without issue so long as they do not cause their ball to move.

If you are finding it hard to keep up with all the leaves, make sure you are not spending too much time on bunkers. If there are only a few leaves in a bunker, it is probably best to let them be for the time being and focus on other areas of the course. Blowing bunkers out every other day, or even less frequently, could help free up labor to tackle other important jobs.



For information on the USGA's Course Consulting Service Contact the Green Section Staff.

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