



*Turf is under stress and populations are shifting. Bentgrass outcompetes Poa annua during summer and bentgrass populations currently are increasing.*

## THE COUNTDOWN BEGINS

BY DAVID OATIS | REGIONAL DIRECTOR, NORTHEAST REGION

July and August usually bring the toughest weather of the year for golf course superintendents, and the weather pattern now hitting the Northeast qualifies as a potential worst-case scenario event for turfgrass! Under the predicted weather conditions, it is important to avoid as much traffic and wear stress as possible. Consider not mowing greens, perhaps not even rolling and raising cutting heights. Decide how best to handle golf cart traffic. Confining carts to paths or instituting the 90-degree rule may be appropriate. Make sure turf fans are operational if you have them. Remember that syringing may be necessary but it is only effective if there is enough air flow for evaporation. Adding more moisture under hot, humid and stagnant conditions can make things worse.

Let golfers know how important syringing can be under these extreme weather conditions. Encouraging golfers to play earlier is an option some may choose. Prepare your staff for the extreme weather as well. Make sure they pre-hydrate and remain hydrated throughout their shifts. Consider bringing in more staff and give them more frequent breaks.

Here are a few additional recommendations to help get your turf across the finish line:

### **Play defense:**

Most superintendents are on the defensive at this point in the season. This is the time of year when “good ideas” get people in trouble. If you have a good idea, sit down and wait for it to go away! Okay, at least think twice about it. Aggressive action when turf is at its weakest can save it or push it over the edge. [Sometimes doing nothing is the best thing to do.](#)

### **Manage water more carefully than ever:**

Virtually every course I visit has moisture meters and most superintendents agree they are one of the most valuable tools yet invented. Double check your units and make sure they’re calibrated and equipped with the appropriate-length probes. A 3-inch probe may be misleading if your putting green roots are 1-inch deep. If you don’t have GPS-enabled units, get them or put them in the budget for next year. Take your moisture management to the next level by recording moisture levels with the corresponding locations.

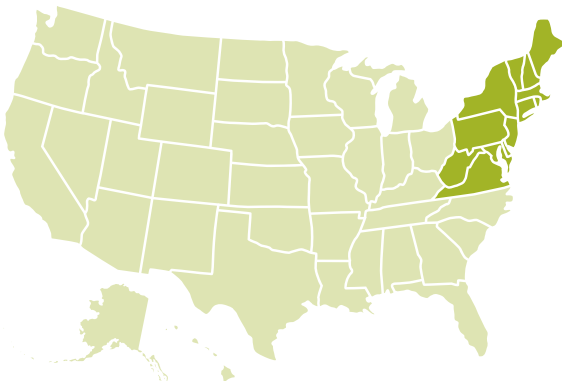
### **Track your grass populations:**

Most northern courses have a mixture of *Poa annua* and creeping bentgrass on greens, but there are thousands of biotypes of each. The different species and biotypes all react differently to stress, weather, maintenance practices and traffic. Knowing your grass populations and tracking how the populations change seasonally and annually provides information to help make better decisions. We can’t change the weather, but maintenance practices can shift grass populations and it is important to know which species are being promoted. Your maintenance practices are effecting change. Make sure it’s the change you want.

### **Don’t starve your turf:**

Nitrogen fertility rates for putting greens are like clothing fashion: what’s in vogue today will be out of style tomorrow. I once heard Dr. Joe Duich, professor emeritus of turfgrass science at Penn State University, say that, “... turf management is one big pendulum and your goal should be to not get on it!” High nitrogen rates were required to break the anthracnose cycle 10-15 years ago, and the disease hasn’t been a major problem at most courses for several years. However, the new “low-nitrogen trend” will breathe new life into a tired disease if we aren’t careful. Take a tip from Dr. Joe and don’t go too low.

Normally at this time of year we hear the adage, “We just need to make it to August 15!” By then, daylength is shorter and nighttime temperatures often are cooler. At least that’s the way it used to be. Recently, the seasons and the calendar seem to have shifted. Springs have been colder, and the expected break in late August hasn’t been arriving on time. So, the countdown to August 15 is on, but don’t plan on the weather letting up then.



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