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A Giant Leap Forward

How soil moisture meters are changing the game of putting green irrigation

by Randy Gatlin, Golf Course Superintendent, Robert Trent Jones Trail at The Shoals

Moisture management is one of the most important aspects of bringing creeping bentgrass putting greens through a southern summer. Too much moisture encourages maladies such as leaf and root diseases, softness, more susceptibility to mechanical damage, algae, etc. Too little moisture brings on wilt, higher canopy temperatures, and potential for more localized dry spot. At The Shoals (Muscle Shoals, Alabama), we strive for the optimum level of moisture each day to give the bentgrass the best chance to thrive despite soil and air temperatures that are often hostile.

In 2010, we obtained a Field Scout 300 TDR Soil Moisture probe from Spectrum Technologies. Almost immediately we began learning nuances about the putting greens, their performance, and the irrigation system distribution. This article will discuss some discoveries we made using the Field Scout on a daily basis and reveal how we use the Field Scout plus a GPS receiver as a diagnostic tool.

To see how Randy uses this tool for:

- Informal Audit of Irrigation Coverage
- Estimate Daily Moisture Loss Through Evaporation
- Early Detection of Wilt Symptoms
- Management of Extremes / Crisis Management

[Read the rest of this article](#)



Superintendent Randy Gatlin

The Drought Might Have You Down But You Better Not Be Out

The Most Critical Time Is Here - Are You Ready?

by [James Francis Moore](#), USGA agronomist

The drought and heat of 2011 has persisted for so long in some parts of the country that it is old news - even though the damage is everywhere you look. Months of 100 degree plus temperatures and a landscape that is so burned and brown it looks more like mid-winter tends to dull the senses after a while.

Golfers have learned to deal with more dirt in fairways than grass, tees with 3-inch cracks in them, and dried up lakes. Dust flies not only when a ball is struck from the fairway, it flies again when it lands in the fairway.

It has been a tough summer to say the least. So it is understandable that many of us are anxiously looking forward to the cooler months when things can settle down a bit. However, for golf course superintendents and course owners this would be a big mistake.

The next 4 to 6 weeks are the most critical of the year given the weakened state of bermudagrass across the region. This brief presentation offers a number of steps that need to be taken **right now** or else the damage next spring may make this summer look easy.

Note - depending on your Internet connection, this presentation may take a couple of minutes to load completely. Be patient!

[Watch this presentation](#)



You know the ground cracks are getting bad when you start losing sand out of the bunkers!

Regional Updates



Mid-Atlantic Region

by [Darin Bevard](#), senior agronomist

Necessary Weed Control Measures This Fall

The first real cold front of the fall season swept through the area in the past week, bringing in much cooler temperatures. This is welcome relief for the grass in what has been a long, and for much of the time, hot growing season. Fall offers the opportunity for some of the best golf course conditions of the season.

With shorter days and cooler temperatures, turf growth is slowing rapidly. Unfortunately, rainy weather patterns have limited opportunities to consistently groom fairways and greens for optimum playability. Temperatures are more favorable for cool-season grasses, but under wet conditions, mechanical damage can occur. Thus, with wet weather, it may be necessary to suspend mowing until turfgrass areas dry out. These delays in mowing can be difficult to implement, but this will prevent rutting of turfgrass areas and other damage. Be patient, and don't inflict damage on yourself.

One area of difficulty in 2011 has been weed control. Oftentimes, weed control is an afterthought. In the past, preemergence herbicides in the spring, along with one or two broadleaf applications, were made per growing season and the golf course was reasonably well weed free. This has been



changing in recent years, with increasing populations of more difficult-to-control weeds that have proven to be far more challenging to control.

During the heat of the summer, bermudagrass populations will expand into areas of weak turf or bare ground. Control of bermudagrass in cool-season fairways is extremely challenging.

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North Central Region

by [Bob Vavrek](#), senior agronomist

Tick, Tock, Tick, Tock

Time is running out, along with daylight and high soil temperatures, for those still trying to recover from the turf losses caused by this summer's heat wave. I'm amazed that some courses are just starting to seed into thin and bare areas on greens and expect full recovery before winter arrives. After all, the weather has not cooperated all season, so why should it start now?

Granted, soil temperature are still pushing upper 60's during mid-day and you might see green bentgrass fuzz on a freshly-seeded site within 10 days or so, if (and a BIG if) the mild weather holds up and nights don't become too chilly. Small, isolated dime- to quarter-sized areas of thin turf can recover when bentgrass creeps in from the borders, but large bare areas need seed, heat and time. Why the pessimism? Do the math. Let's say you began the process the day after Labor Day.



Recovery from mid-summer losses of turf will be a challenge if you wait until Labor Day to start the process. *Poa* will have a better chance of establishment versus bentgrass now that days are shorter and nights are cooler.

Seeding bare area until you see green fuzz-----	10 days
Fuzz grows high enough to mow a few times-----	+ 10 days
Several topdressings and mowing height adjustments	
to encourage turf to fill in between seed lines or aeration holes-----	+ weeks

	= November

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