



GREEN SECTION RECORD



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Lost Grass?

What to do about it.

by [Stanley J. Zontek](#), director, Mid-Atlantic Region



Not every golf course has a good stand of grass every year and under every weather condition. Eventually, turf will be lost somewhere. The challenge is to effectively manage that turf loss curatively as well as preventatively.

Every golf course superintendent will lose grass at some point in his or her career. For that matter, no golf course superintendent is perfect; no budget is so complete as to allow everything to be in stock and available when a problem arises; no golf course has perfect soil; there is no perfect irrigation system or pure water for golf course irrigation; no perfect surface and subsurface drainage; and few have beneficial growing environments for turf, such as full sunlight and complete air circulation for every green, tee, and fairway. Not every golf course has the correct grass growing in the right places. Golf course superintendents are pretty good at what they do in this industry, but turf loss still occurs, sometimes in spite of the best efforts.

A certain amount of turfgrass management relies on luck, some good and some bad. For example, did your course receive that torrential downpour that dumped two inches of water in 30 minutes on the course, or did you miss that storm and don't have to worry about washed-out sand bunkers, wet wilt, scald and *Pythium*? There is an element of luck in everything associated with growing grass outdoors. Sometimes you are lucky and sometimes you are not. The skill of the superintendent or the strength of a budget (or even the best grasses) cannot overcome bad luck with weather.

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A Warm Spring Is Good For Golf, But...

Warm, early spring conditions have been great for golf, but, remember, many courses are not yet fully staffed and pest management programs may require adjustments.

by the USGA Green Section

Tee it up! Golf activity always parallels the weather. A mild winter and warm early spring conditions have been welcomed by golfers across the country. Golfers are not the only ones loving the weather, however, as golf facilities are seeing boosts in early season revenues. Obviously, the unanticipated financial gains are important to all golf facilities, but especially helpful to courses that suffered abysmal margins last year due to extreme weather conditions, most notably the severe drought in the southern U.S. and excessive rain and heat in many Midwestern and northern states.

As golfers gain an early start honing their game in 2012, golf course superintendents are busy with course preparations roughly a month or more ahead of schedule. Staffing is limited at this time and the labor hours available are typically reserved for completing off-season projects, such as drainage installation, tree maintenance, bunker renovations, etc. With full staff levels still several weeks away, turf managers are scrambling to condition golf courses to meet expectations while still trying to complete scheduled off-season projects.



Forsythia bloom, a common plant indicator for turf managers to apply preemergent herbicides for crabgrass prevention, is three to four weeks ahead of schedule in many parts of the U.S.

Labor is the largest line item in a golf course maintenance budget, so the obvious concern in bringing seasonal employees back early is an effect on the bottom line. An early start to the golf season equates to an extended golf season, and this requires more labor and resources for course conditioning and setup. Operating budgets are determined well in advance and on the assumption of a golf season more typical in length. Unless serious adjustments are made to the "to do" list, it is unlikely that turf managers can operate within the approved operating budgets created months in advance. Keep these early-season expenses in mind as the season progresses. In addition to labor concerns, a few other factors need to be considered as they relate to the early spring.

[Read the rest of this article](#)

Long-Term Diet

Research at Michigan State University provides evidence that fertilizing more than the turf can use results in unwanted nitrate leaching.

by [Jeff Nus](#), manager, Green Section Research

At the start of each year, many of us feel compelled to make New Year's resolutions, and it is not surprising that one of the most common resolutions is to lose weight. Perhaps we need a long-term diet?

Maybe that should be the view for fertilizing turf as well. Long-term research at Michigan State University (MSU) suggests that as turf sites age, it may be necessary to reduce the amount of nitrogen (N) fertilizer to lower the risk of nitrate leaching. Golf course superintendents have a responsibility to protect the environment, including the quality of surface and ground water surrounding and beneath the golf course. If fertilizer rates are higher than the turf and soil microbes can use, the threat of nutrient runoff or leaching increases substantially.

Between 1989 and 1991, four large (3.75 ft. diameter by 4 ft. deep) lysimeters were constructed and installed at Michigan State University's Hancock Turfgrass Research Center. After installation, the area was sodded with a blend

of Kentucky bluegrass cultivars including Adelphi, Nassau, and Nugget. From July 1998 through 2002, turf growing over the lysimeters was treated annually with urea at a low nitrogen (N) rate of 2 lb./1,000 ft² (0.5lb. N/1,000 ft² per application) or a high N rate of 5 lb. N/1,000 ft² (1 lb./1,000 ft² per application). Application dates were in May, June, September, and October. As of 2011, the turfgrass area has been under continual fertilization practices for 21 years. Michigan State University scientists analyzed leachate for nitrate-nitrogen (NO₃-N) since 1998 and gained a good understanding of the dynamics of turfgrass nitrogen use as Kentucky bluegrass turf matures over several years.

[Read the rest of this article](#)



Dr. Kevin Frank (shown) and his colleagues at Michigan State University have been monitoring leaching of nitrate-nitrogen and phosphorus from turf plots at Michigan State University for more than two decades.

All Things Considered - A Green Section Staff Opinion

Unreasonable Expectations

Expectations may be great but standards should be reasonable

by [Robert Vavrek](#), senior agronomist, North-Central Region

A short, well-written set of maintenance standards is a valuable document for any private or public golf course. Standards help define what playing conditions golfers can expect to find on the course throughout the season. Green speed for day-to-day play, heights of cut for the various playing surfaces, irrigation practices, bunker maintenance, and schedules for aeration and topdressing are examples of issues addressed in a typical standards document.

In my opinion, far too many courses spend a great deal of time and effort to develop a set of unreasonable, unattainable standards that only serve to set the table for golfer dissatisfaction. These standards read more like a wish list of what the course hopes to achieve with respect to speed, firmness, bunker conditions, etc., versus what the players will likely experience during an average round of golf.



Well-defined maintenance standards provide the guidelines that define course conditions for day-to-day play. Reasonable standards are an asset to any course, but constantly trying to attain unrealistic goals can drain the maintenance budget and compromise the health of the turf.

Maintenance standards fall flat on their face most often when they define and mandate inappropriate playing conditions for a particular time of the season. For example, current standards at a highly regarded course in the North Central Region include a statement that greens will be maintained to provide speeds of 11 to 12 feet from May 20 through October 31. To achieve these standards, the greens will have to be cut short and pushed very hard at the start of the growing season, and this could compromise root growth. Aggressive management well into late fall provides little opportunity for turf to recover from summer stress and harden off properly before winter. Furthermore, have fun punching holes in the greens through the snow. Better yet, try coring greens during April and then try to achieve the unreasonable speed standard by mid-May.

[Read the rest of this article](#)

Regional Updates



Florida Region

Headed Toward The Finish Line And Education Opportunities

The 2012 winter golf season in Florida has been one of the best in the past several years. The lack of any significant cold weather has been very favorable to increased play at most courses and at the same time minimizing the impact of peak season play, traffic and wear damage. As the saying goes, "*all good things come to an end*" and in another few weeks this will be the case with the 2012 South Florida winter golf season. After the Masters, Easter and spring training baseball, seasonal residents will begin migrating north and back to their home courses. No doubt many courses would like to extend the current winter season for as long as possible and maintain maximum revenue flow. With spring arriving four to five weeks early in the north however, a delay in the migration north will probably not occur and with car haulers starting to be spotted around town, there is further confirmation that the end of the season is near.

However, it is not too late to take advantage of an education opportunity prior to the end of the winter season. As USGA agronomists, we see and hear it all. A common concern is always how to get golfers and course officials to understand why basic golf course maintenance practices are so important. Times have changed, and we all have less to work with and greater demands to meet. Doing more with less, or even keeping basic levels of maintenance practices in place is more important than ever before. To help your facility successfully meet such challenges we invite course officials to attend a Regional Golfer Meeting to hear USGA staff explain golf course maintenance practices, why they are important, and the long- and short-term ramifications of cutting back the maintenance program. A USGA rules official will also be on hand to discuss changes in the 2012 Rules of Golf. This is a good opportunity to have course officials hear from an unbiased source and to have all of their questions answered.

To see the Regional Golfer Meeting agenda and sign up to attend, please [read the rest of this update](#)



North-Central Region

Records Are Made To Be Broken

I just heard that over 6,000 weather records have been broken across the country so far in 2012. The record breaking weather serves to emphasize how challenging golf turf maintenance can be. It also reinforces what should be a cardinal rule - hope for the best, but prepare for the worst.

The timing of product applications is currently 3 to 4 weeks ahead of last year. Of course, a return to colder weather could force schedules to change again. One of the best ways to plan product applications is to monitor growing degree days. The GDD tracker offered by Michigan State University (<http://www.gddtracker.net/>) is an excellent tool. Growth regulator applications to manage or suppress *Poa annua* seedheads are a priority for many, and the warm weather pattern this year has necessitated much earlier applications. In addition, the difficult 2010 and 2011 seasons have made pre-emergence herbicide applications for crabgrass control a growing concern at courses throughout the

region. Whether your challenges are *Poa annua* seedheads, crabgrass or spring broadleaf weed control, check out the GDD tracker to improve product timing accuracy.

Disease activity has not been a major issue yet this season in the North Central region, but that could quickly change. Widely scattered pink snow mold (*Microdochium* Blight) and leaf spot damage has been observed on recent visits while last week's warm temperatures favored Dollar Spot. Here are some links to some helpful sites regarding the incidence and control of turfgrass diseases.

<http://www.otgt.org/Bucks-for-Turf-Home/Turfgrass-Disease-Management-Notes-4833.html>.

Purdue's turf disease risk forecaster (<http://bny.agriculture.purdue.edu/turfcast/>) is a good site to monitor.

Dr Vincelli's publication "Chemical Control of Turfgrass Diseases 2012" can be found at <http://www.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/ppa/ppa1/ppa1.pdf> and offers in-depth guidance for season-long turfgrass disease management.

[Read the rest of this update](#)

Let 'Er Rip

It's not often that turf is "wearin o the green" before St. Patrick's Day at courses across the north-central tier of states. However, little snow cover or deep frost along with recent rainfall and unseasonably warm temperatures during early March have definitely jump-started turf growth and the golf season.

No doubt, both private and public courses welcome the bonus of unanticipated cash flow from early spring green fees and cart revenue in light of the sluggish golf economy during the past several years. Golfers benefit from extra-early opportunities to play their home courses, but let's hope they keep their expectations reasonable with respect to turf quality. Only an April Fool would demand 4th of July playing conditions on Easter Sunday in Minnesota.

Irrigation systems throughout the Region are not likely to be up and running during early March and the average maintenance crew will be operating well below full strength until Memorial Day. As a result, an early opening can be quite disruptive to the turf maintenance program. For example, mild weather during late winter always makes it very difficult to predict when to apply growth regulators for *Poa annua* seedhead suppression.

[Read the rest of this update](#)



Mid-Atlantic Region

Everything is Popping! Turfgrass Management Is Truly A Dynamic Business

As a general statement, we are about four to five weeks ahead of "normal" (whatever that is) weather patterns. During a recent Turf Advisory Service visit (TAS), I had the opportunity to sample soil temperatures. At this time of year we normally see soil temperatures in the 30 to 40 degree Fahrenheit (F) range. However, it has been common this spring (and it is now spring) to see readings in high 50's (F) to the mid 60's (F). These elevated temperatures have prompted urgency with regard to implementation of several programs normally performed in early to mid April. The grass is growing!

Mowing has begun for most, if not all courses. However, this early return to turf growth finds most operations short-handed. Crew call backs have begun but most operations are not up to their full staffing levels. Priorities have to be set! Greens are always the highest priority followed by fairways, tees and then the rough. Golfers should have patience when it comes to playing an errant shot that has found the rough. This pleasant weather has provided an opportunity for golfers to get out on their favorite course much earlier compared to the last several seasons. The grass in the rough will be cut as labor resources allow. These are not neglected areas of the course; it is only March!

Treatments for crabgrass should be completed very soon. In fact, crabgrass has already germinated in bare soil in roughs in the Tidewater area of Virginia. We have reached "that" important soil temperature indicator. Pre-emergent

control depends upon product being positioned in the soil before weed germination occurs. This is particularly important for goosegrass. We have had many calls regarding control of this grassy weed. Last year was a stellar year for this weed, particularly in putting greens. Contact our offices if there are any questions regarding control strategies. There is still time to control goosegrass.

[Read the rest of this update](#)



Southwest Region

Arizona Regional Conference Wrap-Up

On Monday, March 26th, the USGA, in conjunction with the Cactus and Pine Golf Course Superintendents Association, hosted the annual USGA Regional Educational Conference at the Gainey Ranch Golf Club in Scottsdale, Ariz. The 100 plus in attendance were treated to a very informative educational lineup. Speakers included:

- Pat Gross, USGA - Topdressing Greens
- Dr. David Kopec, University of Arizona, Mowing Native
- Dr. Kai Umeda, University of Arizona, New Herbicides for Weed Control
- Brian Whitlark, USGA, Colorants
- Michael Lacey, Deputy Director, Arizona Department of Natural Resources
- Scott Richardson, Jaburg and Wilk, P.C. Attorney
- Chris Henninger, ADEQ, Water Quality Division: Permits: Stormwater
- Dr. Chip Howard, TurfScience, Inc.

A brief summary of the talking points for each speaker can be viewed by [reading the rest of this update.](#)

USGA Green Section - Turf Advisory Service

For more than 80 years, the USGA Green Section's sole mission has been to collect and distribute information on proper construction and maintenance of golf courses.

First started in 1953, this service permits individual facilities to reap the benefits of on-site visits by highly skilled USGA agronomists located in Green Section offices throughout the country. Each agronomist visits more than 100 courses annually. Their experience helps golf course staff and officials produce the best possible golf turf for the dollars that can be spent. The TAS's purpose is not to tell anyone how to run a golf course or what products to buy. Rather, it seeks to bring a wealth of information and an impartial yet concerned perspective regarding turfgrass growth requirements, how these requirements might best be managed for golf, and ideas that other golf courses have found to be beneficial.

The Turf Advisory Service is used by the biggest and smallest golf courses. Golf keeps America beautiful, and day after day, year after year, the Green Section helps golf courses produce better turf for better golf. Your golf course should be a TAS subscriber.

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[The Value Of A USGA Turf Advisory Service Visit](#)

[Sample TAS Report](#)

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