

TURF CULTURE

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WINTER INJURY TO TURF

Northern Courses: The exceptionally cold weather this winter which prevailed for long periods over much of the country has caused considerable concern among golf course officials as to the likelihood of damage to turf.

The common grasses used on golf courses in the North are rarely killed by cold weather. Therefore, even the unusually low temperatures of recent months have in all probability not injured northern golf turf.

The extensive and heavy blanket of snow that covered most of our northern states did, however, provide conditions favorable for the development of snowmold in many sections. This type of injury is discussed in a separate article below.

The extremely cold weather in sections where there was little snow covering resulted in freezing the ground to unusual depths. Freezing of this type, contrary to popular belief, does not kill our common northern turf grasses. On the contrary, freezing of the soil has a decidedly beneficial effect from the grass standpoint.

Some golf club officials have entertained the hope that the unusually severe winter may have done great damage to the various posts of golf turf. Unfortunately, there is slim evidence to justify encouragement of that hope. No doubt all the little bugs and the fungi that cause diseases of turf during the playing season will be ready when the time comes to tee up for the usual summer's match against the greenkeeper and his team.

Injury to turf often occurs when ice forms in pools of water collected in poorly drained areas. This type of injury is expected to be less than that which occurs in years of frequent thaws. However, some of such damage may still develop on northern courses.

Southern Courses: Southern golf clubs, particularly those along the northern border of the Bermuda grass belt, are likely to find that the unusually cold weather this winter has killed much of the Bermuda grass. This injury is likely to be most common in turf that is kept cut close, as in the putting greens and the tees. Fortunately, in many sections the grass was protected from the most intense cold by a blanket of snow.

Clubs located in the regions where unusually cold weather prevailed without snow protection should be prepared to do extensive reseeding as soon as it is evident how much of the Bermuda grass has been killed.

An early application of fertilizer will prove of much value in thickening the injured Bermuda grass where the damage has not been severe enough to require reseeding. Light discing with the discs set as straight as possible, followed by dragging with a brush-harrow or other smoothing device and then rolling, will also serve to speed recovery.

SNOWMOLD DISEASE

It is likely that the injury from snowmold on golf courses will be far more extensive this year than it has been for several years. It has occurred this year on courses much farther south than where it is commonly found. The continuous cold no doubt prevented far greater damage to turf than might have occurred had there been the customary prolonged and gradual thaws during the winter. If ground is well frozen when the first snow arrives and the snow melts little during the winter, the snowmold has almost no opportunity to develop. Therefore, courses where this condition prevailed in general have suffered little from this disease this year.

In some sections of the country snow fell before the ground was frozen and the subsequent heavy falls served to insulate the ground from the extreme cold, with the result that the temperature at the surface of the soil was sufficiently high to permit the mold to develop. This was particularly the case under heavy drifts of snow. In such instances snowmold injury has been common.

In the case of many courses covered for a long period with a heavy blanket of snow, the cold weather continued until the rapid thaw in late February. This thaw removed practically all of the snow within a period of a few days, which permitted the disease too short a time to develop any serious turf injury.

Where all the snow did not disappear promptly during this thaw, there has been far more injury since snowmold is decidedly encouraged by gradual thawing.

Seaside bent as usual has been injured by snowmold in a general way far more seriously than have been the other bent grasses grown on golf courses.

At the time this is written the full extent of the damage from snowmold cannot be determined. The disease may develop for several more weeks under favorable climatic conditions.

Treatment for Snowmold: In many instances the turf has been completely killed in patches and these areas should be patched as early in the spring as possible. If this is impractical, the dead areas should be raked or disced lightly and seeded as soon as possible.