

# FLOG — What Turfgrass Would Call It If Given a Choice!

Turfgrass is a living entity that has no voice in creating playing conditions for the game of golf. If turfgrass could talk, what would it say?

AS TOLD THROUGH LARRY “AGROSTIS, CYNODON, FESTUCA, LOLIUM, PASPALUM, POA, ZOYSIA” GILHULY



Severe frost is not the only time you should stay off of us. We are just as sensitive when it is too hot!

Okay, so we can't talk and let our thoughts be heard. However, none of you know that the seven main families of turfgrass (*Agrostis* — bentgrass, *Cynodon* — bermudagrass, *Lolium* — perennial ryegrass, *Poa* — Kentucky bluegrass and that pushy annual bluegrass, *Festuca* — fescue, *Zoysia* — zoysiagrass, and *Paspalum* — seashore paspalum, a newbie in our world) meet annually at a site that will remain private to discuss what is going on in the world of golf, or, as we call it, flog. After all, that is what golfers generally do to us; we are mistreated by players who simply do not understand that we are alive and require care to survive.

We rely on our human partners to make this all work, but we have reached an unprecedented moment in time when something needs to happen. Although we have a strict policy of total silence, the heads of all seven families have finally had enough, and we voted unanimously to voice our concerns about this game you humans play and the way we are treated. So, for the sake of discussion, here are seven demands to allow both groups to enjoy each other's company for a few hours a day.

**1. Low mowing and fast green speeds — are you trying to kill us?** The number-one stress that humans put us through is cutting off

our “hair” so short to the point of causing us to go bald and possibly die. We understand this game you play and the need for certain requirements. We also understand that we need frequent haircuts to keep your game fun and interesting. However, all seven families (okay, so Kentucky bluegrass really does not have a major voice in this issue, but his mouthy cousin *Poa annua* sure does) are trying to come to grips with why it seems so many insist on putting green mowing heights that border on 0.00 inch. Do you really want us to die, or are you simply going a little too far with your clippers to achieve a standard that is seen on TV or is desired by the more accomplished player? On behalf of all of us, please use common sense in this area, and focus first on smoothness. Use the standard programs of aeration, light sand topdressing, careful irrigation, light and frequent fertilization, rolling, and mowing at a height that will not cause severe stress. Oh, and remember that all golf courses are not the same in regard to their contours. A set of severely sloped greens should not be the same speed as the neighbor’s set of pancake surfaces.

**2. Aeration and topdressing — we can’t breathe or survive without it.** We mentioned this in our first demand, but wish to reiterate the importance of these two programs on putting surfaces, approaches, fairways, and tees. Put yourself in our position, with massive weight being thrust upon us from multiple sources, which squeezes the air out of our platform of stability (the soil). Without the constant introduction of more oxygen through regular aeration and sand topdressing, we will eventually suffocate. Don’t believe us? Check out all the traffic areas between the bunkers and greens at your golf course, or the exit and entry areas on cart paths near tees and greens. Turfgrass simply can handle only so much, so protect us by completing these necessary agronomic programs as much as your budget allows.

And one more thing. We get tired of hearing the complaints from the putting green turfgrass about how soft their cousins are on the approaches, resulting in complaints from golfers whom they are trying to please. On behalf of all of us, please treat the 10- to 15-yard approach in front of your greens exactly like the greens themselves in regard to aeration, regular sand topdressing, and organic control.



**3. How would you feel if a massive round ball hit you and your neighbors? And what if the person responsible for this act either ignored it or lifted up your roots? We know how we feel (ball) marked for life.**

The turfgrass on the greens seems to be the focus of this list of demands, and rightfully so, as we are the primary target for all golfers and the place where you seem to spend most of your time (*Poa annua*, bentgrass, bermudagrass, and paspalum request that you watch your language and stop spitting those sunflower seeds on us). With the greens being the primary focus, and so many golf balls causing either temporary damage or permanent death when they strike the green, would it be asking too much of you to spend a few seconds of your time to make sure we survive? Ignoring us completely is the worst option, but trying to fix us the wrong way is almost as bad. Bottom line — push back the displaced turf with whatever tool you have, and don’t be a tool and lift us back to level the surface.

The next time you play golf, realize that every bare soil area is due to a human not knowing how to do one of the most simple and required acts of golf to achieve exactly what you want — smooth and growing putting surfaces. We feel better now, so let’s move on to something besides the greens!

**4. Trees — they are big, all right, those big sunlight bullies. But the root of the problem is how they rob our water and nutrients.** Don’t get us wrong, trees are very

OK, we admit that we can create too much organic material. When we do, please eliminate it as much as possible for both our sakes!



Everyone knows about trees stealing our sunlight, but the real root problem we have with trees is how they steal our water and nutrients. Don't get us started on what they do to cart paths and bunkers!



Trees never grow smaller as they age. They just keep stealing more of our sunlight! Eventually they give us some sunlight, but when key trees are removed, we have a much better chance at survival.

important in many ways, but they are sunlight bullies that rob us of required nutrients and water. If you were trying to maintain a park, that would be one thing, since park lawns generally are mowed at 3 inches or higher. But a golf course is different; thus, on behalf of all turfgrasses, please consider removing trees to the south and east; they may be hurting us and your playing surface. Add in the next factor, and it could be ruining your playing surface.

**5. How would a golfer like to be run over by not one, but hundreds of rolling tires that weigh thousands of times more than they do, especially when it is more than 100 degrees, soaking wet, or frosty? Let's see how well you would survive.** In addition to the compaction issue mentioned earlier, there are times of the year, under certain conditions, when we are very fragile. When it is frosty or very hot, most of us go into *stress alert*. What this means in human terms is *stay off of us*. The same goes for when it is very wet. By understanding these simple considerations, we promise we will provide you with much better growth and playing conditions when severe

weather passes. Oh, and please remember to bring your eyeglasses to the golf course, since the directional signs and postings found around the clubhouse, pro shop, and on the golf course are meant to be read and followed!

**6. Fairways? There is nothing fair about excess organic matter or water to keep us green.** While we admit that we do have one negative, in that we cause excess organic production, it is not something we are really proud of, and it really is not our desire. You see, the problem is, the more we are fed and kept wet to keep us green, the more organic material we produce. This leads to overly wet conditions on some golf courses in the summer, especially on those with bad irrigation systems. Then, when it gets dry, water won't penetrate through what we have created, which leads to stress and possible death. What a dilemma we face just for the sake of color! We have a strong suggestion — green is not great, there is no debate.

**7. Finally, don't golfers understand that we are a living and growing entity? It is their responsibility to adjust their game to the conditions, not our responsibility to remain the same each time they play.** For a species with a superior brain, you humans surely don't seem to think sometimes. For example, I think you forget that we, just as you, are alive and constantly changing on a regular basis. Add to that all the natural conditions we must deal with, in addition to your walking and driving on us, and is there any wonder that you may miss putts now and then when your ball lands on a weak stand of grass or a bare area? There is no way a living entity can remain the same day in and day out, thus it is your responsibility as a golfer to adapt to the conditions. Otherwise, you should play golf on artificial grass. And we all know how good that would feel on a 100+F day.

So that's it — the seven families of turfgrass have spoken for this one time on these seven main topics. However, there are more issues that we may have to address in the future. We hope you are listening, because we are watching.

LARRY GILHULY *listens to and observes turfgrass in the Northwest Region of the USGA Green Section. This in no way implies that the seven families meet annually only in his region.*

## Demands of the Seven Families of Turfgrass

1. Low mowing for green speed can kill us. Please stop this when we look weak.
2. Aeration and sand topdressing — we can't breathe or live without it.
3. Take a few seconds and push ball marks back with your tool — don't be a tool and lift up marks that lead to our destruction.
4. Trees are just big sunlight bullies while robbing our food and water. Remove them without emotion for the best turfgrass conditions.
5. Keep traffic off us during times of severe cold, warm, or wet weather.
6. Fat, wet, and overfed is no way to create healthy turf.
7. Golfers must understand that they are responsible to adapt their game to the conditions. We are alive and changing on a regular basis.



Fixing ball marks by pushing them back allows us to recover much better. Lifting or severely twisting us only promotes slow recovery and bare areas.