



# Open for Business

## Preparing your course for a new season

*Springtime is just around the corner ... and with it the opening of your course. Below, four Canadian superintendents share some of the tips and techniques they use for the beginning of each new season.*

### **Pelino Scenna (Burlington Golf & Country Club)**

At Burlington Golf & Country Club we cover most of our greens for the winter. On 13 greens we use permeable covers and on two flat greens with poor surface drainage we use solid covers. When the weather begins to turn mild, the greens are carefully monitored and mowed as required. They remain covered until the course opening. One week prior to opening, the solid covers are pulled back in the mornings and put back in place in the late afternoons. This allows the plants to harden off gradually while preventing injury from nighttime frost. Using greens covers in this fashion gives us good winter protection and enables us to open the course early with the greens in good playing condition.

Our sandy loam soil drains quickly, so we are able to use heavy equipment very early in the spring. To prepare the course for opening, we first rake the fairways and rough with a tractor-mounted spring-toothed dethatcher. This scratches the turf surface and helps pull up any matted areas. The spring tooth dethatcher is followed by a chain link mat to again lift up matted areas and loosen debris. The debris is removed through blowing and sweeping. The whole clean-up operation takes approximately six days.

### **Doug Meyer, (Cedarbrook Golf and Country Club)**

Most golf courses in Eastern Canada use covers during the winter to protect the greens. The timing of removal is critical and good judgment is essential for success. If insulating covers are left in place too late in the spring, temperatures can rise to critical levels and cause heat damage, or even death to the turf. On the other hand, if they are removed too early, tender turf can be subject to low-temperature kill as a result of the sudden change. At the time of removal, if temperatures remain below freezing, a light permeable cover can ease the transition from covered to unprotected state. If the course is open for play, it may be necessary to replace covers at night until temperatures moderate. I have found this procedure help-

ful in reducing turf injury on greens in the spring.

As well, I maintain a permanent turf nursery on site. Thus, when I find small areas of winter ice damage or snow mold on greens, I'm able to keep my members happy by patching the damaged areas early in the spring and bringing the greens into play right away. This is a whole lot better than trying to rely on early germination of seed in bare areas during times of fluctuating spring temperatures.

### **Jay Leach (Cottonwood Golf & Country Club)**

Here on the prairies, spring is a long, drawn out affair. Golf courses open sometimes weeks before the grass is green and there are leaves on the trees, so I strive early in every new season to make sure members see positive changes in other ways on their course, right from the start. To this end, I will even hold one project back if there's a chance it'll go unnoticed as a result of being overshadowed by another one already underway. "Projects" include any type of improvement, such as new course furnishings or a new landscape feature, or even simply the cleaning up of a previously unsightly area. A coat of paint on almost anything always scores points, as do freshly edged traps or cart paths. What better use of one's pool of talented staff when the grass is dormant and doesn't need cutting than to put them to work on projects that will lift members' spirits and make them glad they joined your club for another season?

### **Barry Endicott (Nobleton Lakes Golf Club)**

For the past couple of years we have not cut our greens with a greens mower after the Thanksgiving long weekend. Instead, we use a tee mower to clean-up debris and create a pattern, but no grass is cut in the process.

This helps prevent winter injury by allowing the leaf blades to heal over, and hopefully leads to less desiccation. Also, the longer turf acts as an insulator. In the spring, as soon as the greens are firm enough we start cutting them. We begin high and lower the cut every week until we reach the optimal height.

We no longer cover all our greens.

In particular, we try to avoid covering our traditional winter hardy greens. On the 12 greens that we do cover, as soon as the frost allows us to remove the pins, we remove the covers. Once we remove the covers, afternoon winds tend to make it not feasible to attempt to re-apply them.

Two of our greens always receive a lot of ice. As soon as it begins to thaw a little, we break it up and remove it. We then leave the covers undisturbed on these two greens for a few days more than we do on the others so that soil temperatures have a chance to even out.

### **Merlin Affleck (Stanhope Golf Club)**

Stanhope Golf Club is located along the north shore of PEI. Usually we open around the first week of May.

Stanhope is a very windy course. I have mostly Poa greens with fairly sandy soil. If we have a problem in the spring it's usually because of ice damage. The first order of business for the spring startup, then, is to get rid of snow and ice on the greens, so I put an organic material (Milorganite) down to speed the thaw.

Once the snow and ice are gone, the greens are quick to dry and we are able to put a power brush through them. Brushing helps in two ways: it enables light to get into the thatch to promote germination of the Poa seeds, and at the same time it smoothes the surface.

We then cut the greens and put tarps on any with winter damage. Usually it is only a matter of seven to 10 days before a noticeable improvement is apparent.

### **Bill Fach (Rosedale Golf Club)**

In early spring, long before the course is due to open, I remove the solid covers that were put down for the winter and aerify my greens and break up the plugs. The winter-long solid coverage results in dry surface and soil, so breaking up the plugs is an easy task. If time allows, I seed and topdress as well.

After cleaning up the surface, I put perforated covers on the greens and leave them there for a few weeks until the temperature gets a little warmer. This practice allows me to get a good jump on the season without bothering the members.