



# The Mountain State Greenletter

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West Virginia Golf Course Superintendents Association

## Board of Director's Message

I hope you are surviving the heat and pop-up showers of August and that all systems are a go. The weather has proved difficult once again in the Mountain state and from my travels, I know that you are faring well. I've been fortunate to travel with my high school aged son and appreciate the hospitality and conditions of courses that we have visited so far. I know that junior golf events can be challenging but we have to remember that these players are our future and the exposure that they are getting now is the foundation to teach them respect for the course and the game in the future.

As we head into the fall, we are in full swing preparing for our annual turf conference. If you have ideas or speaker suggestions, now is a great time to reach out to me or Amber to share. We want the conference and all we do to be meaningful to you as a member and to elevate our profession and the game of golf in West Virginia.

Looking forward to seeing you soon.  
Mitch Roush, President, Riverside Golf Course

*Annual Fall Meeting - October 10th at Bridgeport Country Club  
11am Meeting/Lunch and Golf to Follow  
We hope to see you there!*





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# Finish the Summer Strong

## By Brian Gietka, agronomist, East Region

It's that time of summer when the staff is tired, the turf is tired and the weather is relentless. On recent USGA Course Consulting Service visits, I've observed many courses letting the turf grow a bit by skipping or stretching plant growth regulator (PGR) applications, reducing mowing frequency, or applying a little extra water and/or fertilizer to give the turf a break. While this might be beneficial, careful management is still necessary. High temperatures coupled with high humidity and plenty of moisture creates an environment where the turf is photosynthesizing and taking up water yet unable to transpire, which swells the leaf blades. Pop-up rainstorms can trigger a flush of growth when you're using defensive maintenance strategies and voilà – soft, puffy, overgrown turf that is vulnerable to scalping and mechanical damage. Other times, multiple rain events do not allow for PGR applications or regular mowing, or thick thatch layers hold water and increase the risk of mechanical damage.

Managing damaged or weak turf can be like walking a tightrope, especially while trying to deliver the playing conditions golfers expect. Here are some tips to regain turf health, maintain good playability and finish the summer strong:

**Raise mowing heights:** Slightly increasing the height of cut or simply replacing grooved rollers with solid rollers can give just a little more leaf surface for plants to produce more energy.

**Lightly topdress:** A light dusting of sand topdressing provides enough cushion to allow mowers to ride on top of stems and crowns. The sand will also coat voids in the turf to reduce sunlight to algae and moss.

**Reduce PGR rates:** When you want to encourage growth, cut PGR rates by 50%-75%. This will allow the turf to come out of regulation but not with excessive rebound growth.

**Minimize nitrogen:** Growth is good but excessive growth will contribute to soft, puffy turf. Spoon-feed fertilizers more frequently at a reduced rate for more-precise growth management.

**Manage water carefully:** With turf having the shortest roots of the year, manage water by evaluating root depths, utilizing portable moisture meters and accounting for evapotranspiration rates.

**Apply plant protectants:** When turf is soft, driving sprayers on it might be concerning but the potential damage from pests will be worse. Consider applying plant protectants in the evening or whenever turf surfaces will be firmest.

**Vent surfaces:** Improving gas exchange and water infiltration improves turf health and the process can make the difference between continued deterioration or recovery. If the turf has weak roots and a thin canopy, a light spiking might be better than using needle tines, which could cause damage. Exercise caution, less could be more.

**Communicate:** Let your course's patrons know what the turf is experiencing and what to expect during their round. Taking it easy on the turf will have a short-term impact on playing conditions but long-term benefits for turf health.



*Adjusting maintenance practices to reduce turf stress during hot, humid weather will help get your course through the rest of summer.*



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# Minimize, Don't Accessorize

By John Petrovsky, manager, Green Section Education

Many things about golf course maintenance can be surprising to golfers. But if you really want to see some jaws drop, show them the invoice for a few ball washers and benches. I recently heard from a supplier about how much they would charge to outfit 18 holes with one high-quality bench, garbage can and ball washer per hole. Care to guess? Well, if you tack on six water cooler stations the grand total was over \$35,000. That's a lot of money. Money that in most cases is better spent elsewhere.

Despite superintendents' best efforts, the accessories that disappeared during COVID have mostly made their way back onto the course. With rising costs for almost everything, it's worth evaluating how many accessories you really need and how to take care of them to make sure they last as long as possible. Here are some things to consider:

- Ball washers are perhaps the most unnecessary accessory of all. They're also costly to maintain and frequently require new parts. However, golfers get used to having them so removal can cause pushback. A good compromise can be placing them only a few holes.
- Water cooler stations are among the most expensive and labor intensive of all accessories. Making your own custom stations in-house can save a few bucks and makes a good winter project. Since they tend to be large, consider putting coolers in out-of-the-way areas where they don't detract from the appearance of the course. It also makes them easier to service without disrupting tee shots.
- Benches are another accessory that courses can go overboard with, especially if most rounds are played with carts. If benches are needed, find spots for them that are easily accessible by golfers but won't interfere with maintenance or create a cluttered appearance. Moving benches to mow or string trimming around them takes more time than golfers think.
- Garbage cans are typically the one accessory you can't go without. Fewer larger cans are usually better than many small cans, especially if you locate them strategically on holes where golfers are likely to have litter, like right after the halfway house. Consider putting them away from turf areas to lessen maintenance, improve aesthetics, and make them easier for staff to service. In-ground cans help with appearances but do your homework before opting for them. They can fill with water, become a tripping hazard, and potentially cause several other issues.
- Club washers and shoe brushes are a big no-no on the course itself. They require a ton of upkeep and are often hit by equipment or golf carts and damaged since they are low to the ground. It makes sense to offer a few of them near the clubhouse or practice area so golfers can clean up before or after their round.
- Maintaining turf, mulch or ornamental plantings around accessories requires significant labor hours and can lead to increased wear and tear. It's generally better to have accessories located on hard surfaces like extensions of the cart path or pavers.
- Protect your investment by keeping accessories painted and in good order. If you have the space, store accessories out of the elements during winter.

Superintendents have lots to consider when it comes to accessories. If food and beverage is a big part of your operation some extra garbage cans make sense, in hot climates a few extra water coolers are a good idea, and if most golfers walk having benches might be important. Still, keeping accessories to a minimum makes the course look better, reduces time-consuming maintenance and saves money.

Minimizing accessories is a great way to streamline maintenance and keep your tees looking stylish. For more strategies to simplify maintenance at your course, please reach out to a regional USGA agronomist.

Northeast Region Agronomists

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*A surprising amount of money goes into buying and maintaining the accessories in this picture.*

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