

CHUCK'S AGRONOMY

What preparations are involved in closing the golf courses for winter?

To insure all the different tasks are finished in a timely manner, we close our courses in October. With the unpredictability of mother nature, there is a lot to accomplish in a short time.

Between the two courses we aerify and topdress all tees, approaches and fairway drain basins. We also aerify the roughs next to the cart paths to help alleviate compaction from the carts. These areas will be verti-cut several times to pulverize the plugs, then drug-in and the remainder will be picked up or blown into the native. We will also hit fairway spots in the same manner.

Tee markers, signage, flag poles, rope and stakes and marker blocks will be picked up and inspected for wear. These noted pieces will be refurbished or replaced during the winter. The green cups are also pulled and the hole filled with sand so the area won't dry out. During our frosty mornings, we haul fence and T-posts to the greens along with the green and white tarps.

Before we blow out the irrigation system, we soak the courses to help fill up the soil profile so they do not go into winter to dry. Until the snow covers the grass, desiccation is a large problem. To clear all the irrigation lines, valves and sprinklers it takes four 10-hour days to complete.

Next, we will solid tine the greens at the Nicklaus to a depth of 7 inches with 1/2" tines. Sand will be applied first, so we don't damage the green surface with the heavy equipment. After the aerification, the sand will be drug with a steel mat and finished with a mechanical broom to work the rest of the material into the holes. Hand brooming will help fill any holes and clean up any excess sand. This is a four day process if we don't have any foul weather.

Once aerification is complete we apply the chemicals to the greens, tees, approaches and fairways on to protect from snow mold. We apply the products to both courses over a period of four days using two sprayers, an 800-gal mix tank and five applicators. These applications need to be performed with temperatures above 40 degrees, and on unfrozen ground.

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Continued

On the Nicklaus Course, the Elk enjoy playing in and eat the grass off the bunker face. The sand itself is very light and prone to wind blowing it out of the bunkers. To combat these issues, we place wooden pallets throughout the bunker bottoms and faces.

The next task is applying the covers to the greens. We only cover greens that are prone to ice, wind, desiccation or excessive snow. Before we can apply the covers, we have to take all the electric fences down, move the t-posts to the collars, pin down the covers, slide 2" PVC pipe over the T-post and the 6-foot fence is installed a foot above the ground. This gives enough height to the fence; the Elk won't try to jump over it. The Dye course doesn't have the height issue, so we only install 5-foot fences after the greens covers have been installed. I use more covers at the Dye course to protect the Poa annua mix.

Some of our efforts to help us come out of winter healthier include adding a green colorant to our fall application of Snow Mold, which lasts under the snow and is present in the spring, helping warm up the turf sooner. We are also experimenting with topdressing on some tees and fairways this fall. Tests in Colorado and at Promontory showed leaving sand acted as a deterrent to the voles. They do not like the gritty grass and left the areas alone. We are expanding our areas to include more fairways and tee tops. Less winter damage means less spring clean-up.

This is a lot of work to be performed in a short period of time. Our goal each Spring is to come out of the winter in the best playing condition possible.

"A rough should have high grass. When you go bowling they don't give you anything for landing in the gutter, do they?" - Lee Trevino



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