

THE BEST TURF TIPS OF 1993

ALGAE BUSTERS

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A groomer reel, mounted on a lawn mower handle, is one method to help the superintendent break up an algae layer (left). The Garden Weasel is being worked over a problem area, resulting in a thorough shredding of the algae crust (right).

SURFACE ALGAE is a fairly common nuisance problem of putting greens throughout the country. No doubt it will continue to be a thorn in the side of golf course superintendents because of the environmental factors that favor its growth. The most favorable conditions are wetness and humidity, along with a fertile, compacted, waterlogged soil. If the turf canopy is thinned for any reason, a green or black algae scum quickly becomes established.

Just as a quick review, algae are minute, single-celled, thread-like green plants. Their spores are spread by wind and rain, and algae is neither a pathogen nor a parasite of turf. Researchers have found that most algae scums are composed of eukaryotic types and cyanobacteria.

Although surface algae is often a summertime problem in many areas of the country, the mild winter conditions of Florida make it a problem throughout the year. This winter, many courses throughout the state have been battling algae because of the unusually wet weather that has persisted.

From the first of November through the end of December, more than 27 inches of rain fell in Palm Beach County. Also, some courses have added 8 to 9 inches to the total during the first 10 days of the new year. The winter months are supposed to be the dry season in Florida!

When it comes to preventing surface algae, maintaining a dense turf cover and following through with proper irrigation practices and drainage improvements are the first line of defense. After an algae scum has formed, however, cultural and chemical control measures are usually required.

Spiking/slicing operations or coring is beneficial in breaking up and drying out algal scum. However, the resulting crust is almost impenetrable to light and water, and it tends to retard reestablishment of a good turf cover. When this happens, additional mechanical cultivation is needed to further break up the algal crust.

At two golf courses, unique methods have been found to help break up algal crust following spiking or as a spot treatment approach for small isolated patches.

Bill Henderson, golf course superintendent at the Wellington Country Club in the West Palm Beach area, has attached a groomer reel to an old lawn mower handle. The device is then "worked" over the problem area, and the close spacing of the blades results in a thorough shredding of the crust. During the fall and winter, this device also is used to prepare a seedbed prior to reseeding of thin areas in the winter overseeding layer.

Across the state at Quail West Country Club, just north of Naples, Florida, Kevin Leo also has found a very good Algae Buster. While shopping in a local hardware store, Kevin spotted a display for the Garden Weasel tool. The "ole light bulb" went off and he purchased one to try on a few algae spots. To his delight, the Garden Weasel did a good job of breaking up the algae so that turf coverage could be reestablished.

From time to time, surface algae probably will be a problem on putting greens across the country. To help bring it under control, you might want to give one of these Algae Busters a try.