



The Importance of Staying Off of the Golf Course Turf in Late Fall

As the vibrant greens of summer give way to the crisp air of fall, golf courses undergo significant changes. It's crucial for golfers, residents and our guests alike to understand why staying off the turf during late fall and winter is essential.

Here are some key reasons:

1. Frost and Ice Damage

During late fall, temperatures often drop below freezing at night, leading to the formation of frost on the grass. When frost forms, ice crystals develop within the plant cells, making the grass blades brittle and susceptible to damage. Walking or driving over frost-covered turf can rupture these cells, causing the grass to die or become severely weakened. This damage might not be immediately visible but can lead to long-term issues, including bare patches and increased susceptibility to diseases and weed infestations.

2. Soil Compaction

Wet and thawing soil in late fall is more prone to compaction. When the ground is soft, foot traffic and golf carts can compact the soil, reducing its ability to absorb water and nutrients. Compacted soil restricts root growth and can lead to poor turf health, making it harder for the grass to recover in the spring. Keeping off the turf during these conditions helps maintain soil structure and promotes healthier turf.

3. Disease Prevention

Late fall is a critical time for turf disease management. The grass is already stressed from the summer heat and the changing weather conditions. Walking on the turf can introduce and spread fungal diseases, which thrive in cool, damp conditions. One common fungicide we use to protect turf over winter is called Instrata. This fungicide is used to prevent Pink and Grey Snow Molds (*Microdochium nivale*/*Typhula incarnata*). Minimizing foot traffic helps ensure that treatments like Instrata can work effectively, providing a healthier playing surface. It is also important to note that Instrata's label, regulated by health Canada's Pest Management Regulatory Agency, specifically states: ***Do not allow the public to enter into treated golf courses following late fall application for snow mold.***



Photo 1 - Turf damage on #18 from walking on frosted green.



Photo 2 - Ineffective mold control from snow compaction; note the cross country ski tracks on #12, from skiing too early.



4. Preparing for Winter

Golf course maintenance teams often use late fall to prepare the turf for the harsh winter months. This includes applying fertilizers and other treatments to strengthen the grass. Disturbing the turf during this time can interfere with these preparations, leading to weaker grass that is less able to withstand winter stress. By staying off the turf, you allow these treatments to be fully absorbed and effective.

5. Aesthetic and Playability Concerns

Lastly, maintaining the aesthetic and playability of the course is important for the enjoyment of golfers. Damage caused by walking on frost-covered grass or compacted soil can result in unsightly patches and uneven playing surfaces. This not only affects the visual appeal of the course but also the quality of play. Ensuring that the turf remains undisturbed during late fall helps maintain a high-quality playing experience for everyone. In conclusion, staying off golf course turf in late fall is crucial for preventing frost and ice damage, avoiding soil compaction, managing diseases, preparing for winter, maintaining the course aesthetic and playability next spring. By respecting these guidelines, golfers can help ensure that their favorite courses remain in top condition year-round.

Please, if you have any more questions or need further information, feel free to contact me directly, I truly love talking turf.

Sincerely,

Keith Lyall
Golf Course Superintendent



Photo 3 - Snowshoes on #15 fairway; not on an approved route and too early.