

Keep that mower sharp during the spring growth surge 5/1/20

The spring growth surge is sure in full effect. Managers of home lawns, golf courses, athletic fields, and commercial properties are struggling to keep up with the growth. If possible, try to raise mowing heights if it is difficult to keep up. Scalping the turf actually increases the growth rate through a process of compensatory growth. So scalping is actually making the problem worse. Try to stay close to the 1/3rd rule or not removing more than one third of the leaf during a mowing even.

It is essential to have a sharp, well-adjusted, mower when the grass is long and wet. Failing to mow with a sharp cutting unit can lead to turf discoloration. The leaf tips will look shredded and the turf will have a brown hue. A dull mower can also increase disease because the pathogens attach to the damaged leaf tissue.

For rotary mowers, remove the blade and grind out any imperfections. If all the nicks cannot be removed, then replace the blade. When grinding, try to make the existing blade angle. Too steep and the mower may dull too quickly. Don't let the blade get too hot as this can lead to warping. Once you have completed the grinding, place the blade on a bald balance to make sure the blade is in balance. Check the user manual for more information.

Reel mowers also need frequent adjustment to maximize quality of cut. This is especially true in early spring because many putting greens have a significant amount of sand-topdressing on the surface. This can rapidly dull a newly ground reel and bedknife. Most user manuals have extensive information about proper reel-bedknife adjustment. Many manufactures will state the ideal grinding angles for the bedknife and the reel in the manual. If you are unsure or do not have a grinder, than contact your equipment service provider to have the reels ground and bedknife replaced.

Most manufactures recommend setting the bedknife to reel contact with two thin pieces of paper. When they are placed perpendicular to the bedknife, the first piece should be cut and the second piece should be bent over the bedknife as the reel is carefully rotated. Remember to recheck the height of cut after changing the reel to bedknife contact.

Try to stay on top of the growth surge with a properly adjusted mower this spring.

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Figure 1. Keeping reel-mowers sharp can be a challenge in early spring because of late fall sand topdressing. Symptoms of a dull mower include a brown turf appearance, especially on overlapped areas, and torn or shredded leaf tips.