

Winterkill recovery: Hope for the best and plan for the worst
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We are beginning to discover the extent of the winterkill across the state. Last week's warm weather and weekend precipitation has accelerated the green-up following a cold and dry March. Recovery in southwest Nebraska looks to be slightly ahead of the rest of the state. While the western half of the state appears to have fared slightly better than the eastern half, most golf courses have some amount of winterkill that will need to be seeded this spring. The question remains, what needs to be seeded and what just slow to green up?

Bentgrass greens, tees, and fairways have been very slow to green-up. By the end of last week, however, there were significant differences between protected bentgrass surfaces and exposed and thatchy bentgrass surfaces (Figure 1). Many superintendents have been digging for any sign of life. We've received reports of white roots several inches below straw-brown turf and gives the superintendent hope for spring recovery. This may be the case; however, white roots can be deceiving following winter. The dry and frozen soil can preserve white color during winter. Some superintendents have noticed white roots two weeks ago have turned brown with the warmer weather last week. Look for new white roots emerging from the base of the crowns to assess plant viability (Figure 2). Additionally, look for new green leaves to emerge from the center of the whorl instead of simply looking for any sign of green foliage. The tough winter conditions killed much of the exposed leaf material and new leaves will need to regrow from the crowns.

Small patches of green have given many superintendents hope that the grass will recover and won't need to be over-seeded this spring (Figure 3). While we're also hopeful at UNL, we recommend that affected superintendents prepare for the worst. Make plans to acquire seed, equipment, fertilizer, covers. Our current recommendation is to seed suspect areas as soon as possible to allow the young plants to mature before the stressful summer conditions. There are several resources on our website turf.unl.edu to hasten recovery and communicate to the golfing public.

Helpful Turf iNfos:

[Golfer Winterkill FAQ](#)

[Comprehensive Guide to Winterkill](#)

[Choosing Grasses for Repairing Damaged Areas](#)

[Poa Control in Recovering Greens](#)

[Seeding Kentucky Bluegrass/Perennial Ryegrass Mixes in the Spring](#)

[Spring Seeding Tips for Kentucky Bluegrass or Tall Fescue Lawns](#)

Bill Kreuser, Assistant Professor and Turfgrass Extension Specialist, wkreuser2@unl.edu

Figure 1. Creeping bentgrass has been slow to green-up this spring. Last week’s weather is beginning to show the extent of the winterkill. Exposed creeping bentgrass surfaces with significant thatch and perennial ryegrass are the most affected.



Figure 2. Look for new root and shoot regrowth from the crown. White roots several inches deep can retain their color in the cold soil even though the plant crown may be dead.

Figure 3. Limited signs of recovery can give a false sense of hope. Plan for the worst and hope for the best. Seed suspected areas early to give time for the new seedlings to mature before summer.

