

Golfer FAQ: Winterkill 2015 Edition

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Unfortunately, many golf courses in Nebraska were impacted by winterkill in 2015. The following are answers to the most frequently asked questions from golfers regarding this year's winterkill in Nebraska and the Great Plains.

Why did the grass die?

The turfgrass likely died from the abrupt arrival of cold weather in November 2014. For example, Lexington, NE had high temperatures in the 60s and 70s until a powerful cold front crossed Nebraska on November 10th. Highs during the following week struggled to break 30°F with lows in the single digits.

Cool fall temperatures cause the turfgrass plants to adapt and prepare for winter. The abnormally warm weather limited that adaptation (called hardiness) which caused the turf to die with the sudden cold weather.

Why is the course across town fine?

Different turf species and even different varieties of the same species suffered different levels of damage. There was also more randomness compared to winterkill in 2014 that was most obvious on hilltops. Damage is also worse on very highly maintained turf (i.e. greens).

Could anything have been done to prevent this winterkill?

No, the warm October weather and rapid cool-down caused the turf to die. Even turf under covers was affected by winterkill. Covers typically aren't applied until the turf is dormant in early winter and would not have been down prior to the temperature swing in early November.

What's being done to aid recovery?

Thinned turf will slowly recover, but larger areas will require overseeding. Golf course superintendents are using their experience and

education to quickly repair and recover from the winterkill damage. Seeding continues this spring as soil temperature increases and the risk fades of another hard frost. The new seedlings will need expert care to speed recovery and prepare the new plants for summer heat and drought stress.

How long will recovery take?

Recovery will largely depend on mother nature. The early May frost across much of Central and Western Nebraska has slowed recovery. Warm temperatures and ample rain will help accelerate recovery. Please be patient.

What can golfers do to help?

Please respect all cart rules and golf course signs. New seedlings can be easily killed by foot or golf cart traffic. Patience now will accelerate recovery and get your favorite course back to tip-top shape as quickly as possible.

Authors: Bill Kreuser, Assistant Professor and Extension Turfgrass Specialist, Department of Agronomy & Horticulture, University of Nebraska–Lincoln.



Figure 1. Winterkill in 2015 likely resulted from the dramatic change in air temperature during early November 2014. Turf plants weren't yet adapted to the cold weather and died. Warm spring weather, expert management, and a lot of patients are required to promote rapid recovery.