

PROTECTING BERMUDAGRASS FROM EXCESSIVE WINTERKILL

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1. In order to increase the amount of insulation needed to protect bermudagrass crowns from excessive winterkill, consider the following practices:
 - a. As bermuda slows growth, during late August, raise the mowing heights to 1 to 1½ inches or higher. The final mowing may be as early as mid-September. The more plant material, the more winter protection.
 - b. As bermuda slows growth, keep traffic to a minimum. Bermudagrass is very wear tolerant when growing fast during the summer but not as traffic tolerant when growth subsides. If areas are worn bare before winter, the chance of spring recovery is poor.
 - c. If at all possible, keep traffic to a minimum when the soil is wet, e.g. consider canceling an event if the field is extremely wet, or attempt to protect the heavy wear areas with plastic or light tarpaulins when raining. But if the sun comes out, or you have a tarpaulin on the turf, get it off in a hurry to prevent excessive heat buildup and leaf tip burn.
 - d. Allow no practices on game fields during slow growth periods (usually from September through May), and no incidental play by clubs or classes.
 - e. In early December consider covering the field, especially in heavy wear areas, with about four to six inches of clean straw. This can be spread by hand or with a straw blower and usually requires about 300 to 400 bales of straw per acre. There are other types of synthetic covers that can be successfully used and these are usually pinned in place with small wire pins. The straw or cover is usually removed in late March or early April. Because seeded bermudas seldom develop good underground spreading stems (rhizomes) their first summer, covers are very important to protect the young bermuda from winter kill.
2. Sometime during the fall, apply about 125 pounds per acre of potash (K₂O). This is equivalent to about 200 pounds per acre of muriate of potash (0-0-60) or 250 pounds per acre of sulfate of potash (0-0-50). A soil test will determine if other nutrient deficiencies need to be corrected.
3. Good surface drainage is always necessary to protect from winterkill. The field crown should be maintained to have at least a 1 to 1½ percent slope (18" crown). This increases the rate in which water moves from the field. Core aeration of the field also helps reduce surface hydration of the bermuda crowns. This should be done several times each summer.
4. Spring Dead Spot (SDS) disease is increasing in occurrence. It is first noticed in early spring when softball to beach ball size spots fail to green up. It is always most severe after very cold winters. This disease often occurs 3 to 4 years post-establishment and it is very difficult and expensive to control. If you have experienced Spring Dead Spot disease in the past, consider applying a fungicide during early September. (See www.uky.edu/Ag/ukturf for current recommendations.