

To all the UK golfers out there...
“PLEASE BE PATIENT”

Winter golf and especially golf courses in the winter have evolved over the last 30 years. Turf quality in the close season has improved immeasurably, as has the clothing which allows us to play in the most inclement weather. We are therefore playing a lot more golf, throughout the winter months, than we have ever done before. Expectations have also increased, and whilst most people will tolerate a slight drop in turf quality and green speed, they still expect the courses they play to be in decent condition.

For this reason, we must be tolerant when the snow begins to melt and/or the frozen ground begins to thaw. This is when serious and long-term damage can be done. Often, when the thaw is underway, the days can be mild, and the sun can be shining. The snow has disappeared from our gardens, and this is where the problems often start. I know from experience that General Managers / Secretaries start to come under pressure from members to open the course, and it can also be difficult to continually turn away important revenue, especially when the course looks not just playable but very tempting from the clubhouse. However, patience is vital, and we must all respect the judgment of the Course Manager / Head Greenkeeper, and here is why....

Without wishing to teach anyone to suck eggs, the thaw starts from the top. The frost can often penetrate the ground many inches down. When the snow starts to melt, apart from natural runoff, the water has nowhere to run. It cannot permeate through the ground as it would normally as it is sat on several inches of frost. Even if there has not been any snow, the ground only freezes because of its moisture content. Therefore, when the ground starts to thaw, the water just sits on top, saturating the surfaces. Walking on such surfaces alone can be very damaging, and this can take months to repair, especially on fine turf areas such as the greens and tees. When the surface is soft, and the sub-surface is frozen, walking on the turf will break the roots and likely kill the plant. Multiply this with hundreds of footprints over a relatively small area, and without exaggerating, you can devastate your greens. Once again, speaking from experience, this can take until well into June to fully repair and all of a sudden you regret caving in to the desires of the golfers. Certainly, there is not a golfer I know, who would still push to play once they are aware of the consequences of their actions.

So even if the weather is mild, your garden is clear, and the course looks very inviting, please try to respect the decision made by your Club's management. Even if you think they are being overcautious, a few lost days of golf now can help prevent poor greens for months to come.

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