

# Why Does My Course Look Like This?

By: Golfshake Editor

---

Greenkeepers are under constant pressure from golfers as expectations are high. Maintaining a course to those lofty standards can be a rewarding challenge, but there are times when the environment, season, and circumstances mean preventative steps have to be taken by staff, which can prove frustrating to those who pay their memberships and green fees.

Courses are vast canvases, and no matter the time of year, or the prevailing weather, there will be imperfections. This is especially true during winter. But to help you gain a greater understanding of the reasons, and appreciation for the work accomplished by staff and the difficulties they are tasked with overcoming, we have taken a look at several common complaints, with an explanation as to why your course looks a certain way.

## Waterlogged Fairways

Rain is necessary to support the growth and maintenance of a golf course, but such heavy rainfall, as was seen in many parts of England during October 2019, will overwhelm and leave fairways temporarily flooded. The sand based soil of links and heathland typically remain fully open unless faced with the most severe of deluges, but for parklands, drainage can be a significant problem, one that demands patience of members until better conditions prevail.

As the greens staff at [Leyland Golf Club noted on Twitter](#), rainfall in July, August, and September had dramatically increased on the drought they were presented with during the previous year.



## Ropped Areas

You will sometimes come across ropped or fenced off areas on the course, which can impact play, or at very least serve as a strange aesthetic feature. Commonplace during the winter months, greenkeepers have introduced these to direct golfers to walk on other parts of the course, allowing the ground to heal, whether it has become waterlogged or unfit for play.

## GUR

During routine maintenance of a golf course, often typically done during the low season, there may be temporary damage, such as holes being dug up, or materials that are waiting to be removed. These will be declared GUR or a local rule enacted. Tracks left by vehicles will also have this result. While the sight of GUR can take away from the look of a course, there is very good reason for having it there, something that golfers should respect.

## Topdressed Greens

Ever wondered why the greens on your course have a layer of sand on them? [There is a very good reason](#). Topdressing is the process of spreading a layer of sand, or a mixture of sand and loam – nutrient-filled clay and organic material – across the green. Techniques usually fall into two camps – little and often, or heavy and rare, maybe just once or twice a year.

The purpose of topdressing is to dilute the layer of thatch below the surface of the turf. This improves drainage and increases the quality of the soil, allowing for better grass growth and improved smoothness and trueness of the surface.

## Aeration

Golfers hate to putt on greens that have been aerated, with hundreds of small holes being dotted across the surface. You will also see this on tees and certain parts of the course that require this vital technique. Did you know that grass doesn't actually grow in soil? It grows in the air pockets between the particles of soil. So grass needs soil that has air pockets running throughout it, otherwise it can't grow.

However, regular playing on a course compacts the soil, like a huge sponge made of soil and turf. Too much compaction and you'll find the grass becomes squeezed and suffocated – which can cause serious health problems for turf that is already put under stress due to close mowing. Compaction also leads to poor drainage, meaning flooding becomes a big problem.

So to counter this, your greens team will put into place a programme of aeration. By spiking holes into the ground, it increases the amount of space within the soil. This has the effect of increasing oxygen levels, allowing the root system to take a deep breath. For many greenkeepers, this is viewed as [arguably the most important task in the job](#).



### **Winter Greens/Tees**

During the winter months, golfers can be frustrated when they see their course has deployed the use of temporary greens and tees. Not all venues do this, often dependent on their location and type of soil, but for many it's a necessity, especially during periods of frost, despite the annoyance it can stir.

With little to no growth in winter, the pressures on grasses and surfaces are significant, meaning that rest is required to ensure that they will be in the best condition possible for the peak season, otherwise bumpy greens in the spring are likely, in addition to the greater need for topdressing.

### **Bunkers Closed**

Bunkers will often be roped off and closed during winter for maintenance. It's recommended that they are rebuilt every five to seven years, to deliver the best quality, so greenkeepers and clubs will identify particular bunkers to work on each season, limiting the inconvenience - though you may enjoy a free drop from the hazard - but ensuring that the bunkers remain to a high standard. Ultimately, if you want your course to be at its best, this is something to accept.



(Image Credit: BIGGA)

## Muddy Patches & Surface Damage

Regulations and the welcome move towards golf courses being more environmentally friendly have seen many chemicals long deployed being prohibited and withdrawn from use, which has provided fresh challenges for greenkeepers. You may have spotted an increase in muddy patches on the course, often a result of casting earthworms breaking through the surface. Worms naturally help with aeration and ecosystem, but they can leave mud at the surface '**worm casts**', which causes problems.

**Leatherjackets** - larvae of the crane fly - sit under the surface and chew away at the roots of the grass, but most of the damage, typically patches of fairway missing, will have been caused by predators, such as crows and badgers, pulling up the surface to try and reach the leatherjackets. Previously available insecticides dealt with this problem, with alternative measures now being explored to maintain courses to the expected standard.

---

## How to Save Your Golf Course This Winter

By: Golfshake Editor

---

Your golf club needs your help. It goes without saying that winter can be a pressured time of year for clubs as they look to maintain revenues, presenting an acceptable product for members and

visitors, while ensuring that their course is ready and in great shape for the main peak season to come in the summer.

We should always be mindful of doing our part to maintain the course, but this is especially true for winter, when the weather conditions become challenging across the British Isles. Quality cold weather apparel and a desire to get the most from annual memberships has encouraged more golfers to continue playing for 12 months a year, but that raises [vital questions for our clubs as they look to find the right balance](#).

[The added difficulties of winter for golfers have often been featured](#), but what about the greenkeepers and those charged with looking after your local course?



There are commonsense things that we can all adopt, changing our habits and being even more considerate of the environment around us. But what are the specific points to remember?

For a bit of added insight, **Adam Matthews**, the Course Manager at [Moor Allerton](#) in Yorkshire, has kindly shared his thoughts on **ten things** that we can all do to protect our precious golf courses throughout the winter months.

### **Carry If You Can**

Carrying your clubs reduces the amount of wear created by trolleys, especially around greens, tees and walkways where the ground is often raised. This saves a lot of time and money in the spring having to repair and often re-seed and turf damaged areas.

## **Repairing Pitchmarks**

This is important all year round, but even more so during the winter months where often surfaces are a little softer than they are in summer and pitch marks become more common. With temperatures reducing recovery, if not repaired straight away the marked area of the green will often die, and this creates the perfect space for moss and disease to encroach.

## **Using Winter Mats**

Many courses will ask golfers to consider using mats on fairways and certain tees that are particularly open to divot taking, like many par 3s. This is purely down to the lack of growth and recovery in winter months. Again, it's a huge time saver in the spring for the green staff and also allows the surfaces to be the best they can be earlier in the season. It can also help playability for the golfer when playing shots from a waterlogged surface.

## **Obeying Traffic Management**

Greenkeepers will often direct golfers away from certain areas of the course that may have become waterlogged or unfit for play. This can be done by roping/fencing off areas or simply painting lines on the turf. It's really important these are followed not only to protect the golf course but also sometimes for the safety of the golfer.



## **Respecting Decisions**

The hardest part of a course manager's job is making decisions that benefit the golf club and the golfer. We're all on the same team and in winter our job is to provide the best possible playing conditions we can while also protecting your asset, and making sure the course will be ready for the next season.

## **Patience**

Greenkeepers can be affected as much as golfers, and sometimes the ground conditions limit the amount of machinery and equipment we can use. Many jobs take longer than they do in the summer and often course set up can be delayed due to heavy ground/frost/fog etc.

## **Winter Projects**

While the ideal time to get any course upgrades/improvements done is the summer, it's often counterproductive for a golf club having areas of the course closed off during the season. Many greenkeepers are forced to carry out vital maintenance/projects throughout the winter months.

## **Support the Club**

While the golf window is reduced in winter, many clubs take a hit financially if the course is forced to close due to the weather. Golfers can still support the club by still using the catering and pro shop facilities.

## **Etiquette**

Knocking off any excess debris from your shoes before walking into the green is really helpful and stops any damage to the green and greens mower. Bunker management in winter is extremely difficult so please bear with your team as sometimes bunkers are GUR or not raked due to a wet forecast.

## **Educate**

If your greens team have a blog or a social media account, then follow them to get an insight into what they are doing daily to manage the golf course. Greenkeepers don't drink tea and play darts in the winter! They are often maintaining and servicing a vast amount of machinery that your club own or planning ways in which they can reduce and limit turf diseases in a climate whereby many products available in the past have now been taken from the market.