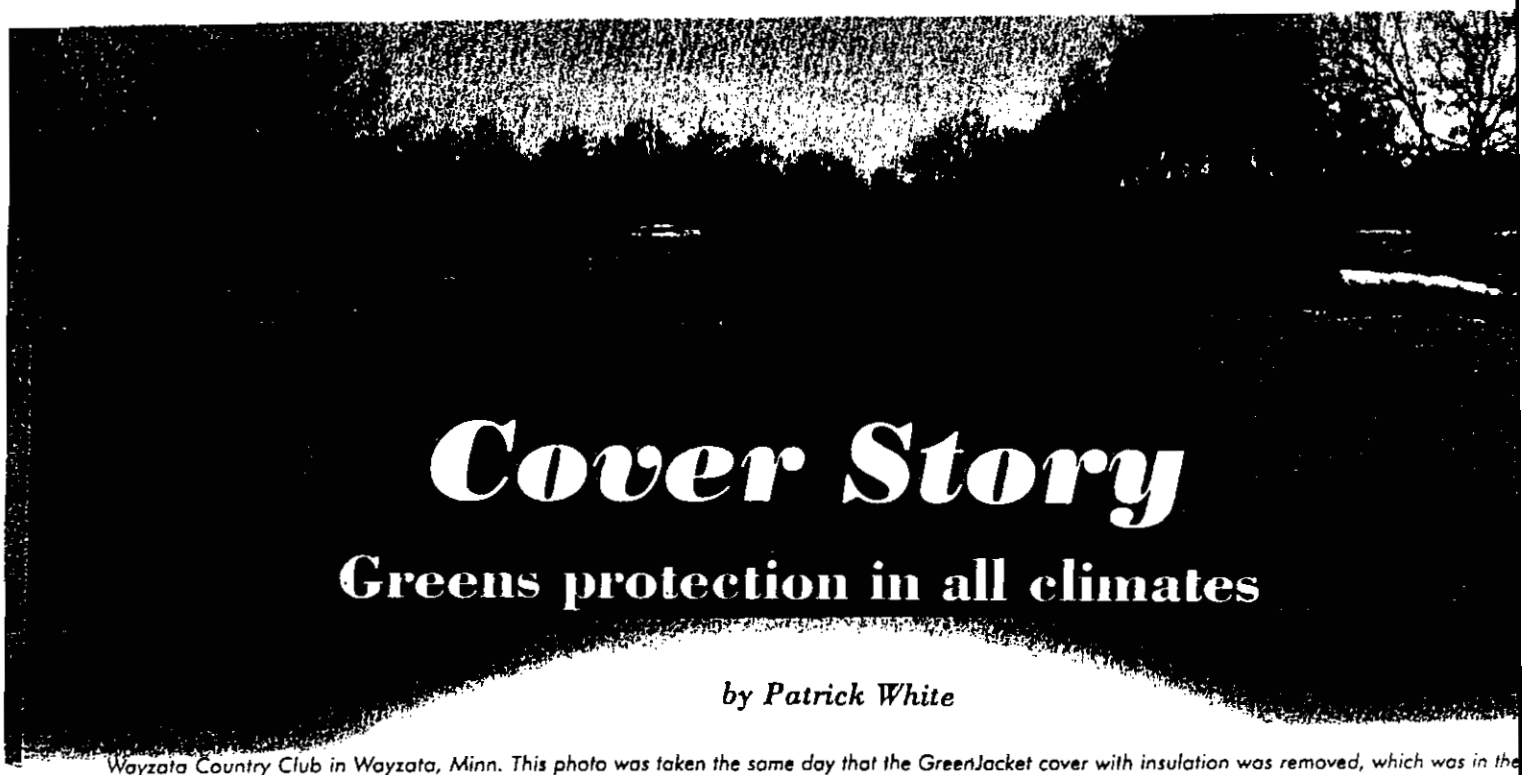

Cover Story

Greens protection in all climates

by Patrick White

Wayzata Country Club in Wayzata, Minn. This photo was taken the same day that the GreenJacket cover with insulation was removed, which was in the first week of April 2005. The GreenJacket is shown rolled up, ready to be stored for the season. Wayzata and the surrounding Twin Cities area was hit badly this past winter with ice damage, which can be seen in the fairway.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF GREENJACKET

To cover or not to cover, that is the question. When it comes to the use of golf green covers, there's a red state/blue state-like schism among superintendents. Even experienced, top-level superintendents differ on their feelings toward the use of covers. Factors ranging from budget to man power to climate to turfgrass type all become part of the equation when a super decides whether or not to cover up putting surfaces. Even some in severe weather locales with a healthy budget and hefty crew shy away from their use.

With an ever-growing number of green cover options—designed for a variety of different purposes—it's worth an open-minded look at a few of the options on the market to see if your course could benefit from a cover-up:

Xton, Inc.

"We have two types of green covers—a black green cover and a white green cover," says John Locker of Xton, Inc. (*www.turfcovers.com*). "The white model is very effective for growing in either bentgrass or bermudagrass during the off-season. They're the type of cover that you can put on and essentially leave on." Courses in southern or transition zones can take advantage of the white cover to speed grown-in—it allows about 80 percent of the radiant heat through—and can use the covers later to protect against frost and freezing conditions.

Xton's black green covers are the company's most popular option. According to Locker, "They're for greens that are already grown-in. They're the type you'd be putting on and taking off on a daily basis, or, for courses in the northern part of the country, they can be left on to protect the green and prevent early green-up."

Both covers are breathable. "They're made out of UV-stabilized woven polypropylene," says Locker. "They're not meant to be waterproof. Some northern superintendents feel they need a waterproof cover—we're trying to conduct research right now to show them that's not the case."

Because the vast majority of Xton's covers are sold from Myrtle Beach to southern California—the transition zone, "Our covers are made specifically to be put on and taken off on a regular basis," explains Locker. "They have handles around the perimeter. Those make it easier to pull around, and also provide the tie-down point for 10-inch tent pegs, to prevent you from having to punch holes in your cover all the time."

Xton's covers—like those offered by most manufacturers—are custom-ordered for specific greens. "We recommend you measure large rectangles big enough to cover the entire green," Locker says. "We have done a couple of covers formed exactly to the green, but nobody really likes those because they only go on one way and it becomes too difficult to put out there. If you have a rectangle, you just mark each of the corners the first time you put it out and then in the future you just have to go right back to those corners."

Locker says the typical set of covers will take three to four hours for a two to three-man crew to put out on the entire course. Handling is helped by the inclusion of a carry/storage bag with each green cover. "They're the type of cover you should never have to replace—the bad thing for us is that means no repeat business," he jokes.

Locker says that covers can be critical tools as more turfgrass experts are discouraging the practice of overseeding at certain southern courses using the latest generation of dwarf bermudagrasses. "You can cover for the early frost, let the greens go dormant in say, December and January, pain the greens and then start covering again in March to protect against the frost during the first part of green-up."

Locker also promotes the use of covers at cou with bentgrass greens, regardless of loc "Superintendents with bentgrass greens think t don't need covers, but they really do," he argues. general, Locker says, "Superintendents usua understand the benefits of green covers—it's m agement and the green committees that can be hard ones to convince."