

The Golf Rules Review

An Intermittent Communique by the 2020 WWGA Golf Rules Maven

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Golf Course Pruning And Other Rule Breakers When Taking Your Stance

Golf course pruning is sometimes used by the creative Golfer to make it easier to hit the ball, but it is also a 2 stroke penalty. The **Do's** and **Don'ts** of taking your stance is the subject of this issue of The Golf Rules Review

“Play the course as you find it” is Rule 8 which means accepting the conditions where your ball ends up. It entails taking your stance fairly, so you can't do something which improves the conditions affecting your stroke in terms of your stance, lie, swing or intended line. Improve means change for the better so that you have an advantage.

“Play the course as you find it” also implies you is **not entitled** to your normal stance or swing. Trees, bushes, hazards, may require the odd stance. As much as we would like it, we **don't** get any relief from them. When trees, branches or bushes are in the way, you are to take your stance in the least intrusive manner that results in minimum improvement.

Here are the **do's** and **don'ts** when taking your stance. Doing any of the **Don'ts** is a 2 stroke penalty or loss of hole in Match Play.

1. **Do** adapt your stance and swing to the situation in the least intrusive manner.

This may mean:

- Backing into a branch if that is the only way to take a stance. It may even cause the branch to bend or break while taking this stance.
- Bending a branch with your hands to get under a tree if that is the only way to get under the tree to take a stance.
- You may move yellow or red penalty stakes or yardage markers that are in your way without penalty. Make sure to replace them after your hit.

But Don't perform golf course pruning or re-arrange the golf course by doing the following.

- Deliberately bend or break or hold back branches with your body or other objects to keep them out of your way for your intended stance or swing.
 - Try to hook branches together to keep them out of your way.
 - Bend or break a branch when there was a less intrusive way to do so.
 - Stomped down tall grass or pull out grasses or plants that may interfere with your swing or stand on tall grasses/plants to deliberately push them out of the way.
 - Pull out weeds or yank out that one wild grass around your ball that may cause a mental interference.
 - Move tee markers or out of bound stakes.
2. **Do** lightly ground your club behind your ball, except you may not ground your club in a bunker. You may also probe for roots or rocks with your club as long as you do not improve the conditions around your ball.

But Don't tap down grass, weeds etc, behind your ball or press your club down behind your ball to crush grass or plants behind your ball.

The Falling Leaves... 🎵 🎵 🎵

Oh no, your ball is under some low branches. You're thinking “what if a leaf falls while I am taking a practice swing or even worse when I make my actual swing... am I going to get a 2 stroke penalty”? Guess what....it's okay as long as there are still so many leaves and branches remaining that the area of your swing hasn't been affected. What is not okay is when you start breaking off branches and large twigs during your practice swing. Any breakage during your actual swing (even if you whiff) do not incur a penalty.

Q&A - What is the difference between rolling the ball with your club on the fairway to improve your lie or just teeing your ball up in the fairway to hit your shot?

Absolutely nothing, they're both a 2 stroke penalty in Stroke Play or loss of hole in Match Play. So in Stroke Play, if you are going to improve your lie in the fairway and take the penalty, go all the way. If you don't want the penalty then do neither.

New golfers often use a tee in the fairway. They get better hits, better hits are more fun, and fun keeps them in the game. They also are not keeping a handicap. So why not?

3. **Do** take reasonable actions to mark, lift and replace your ball under the rules. **But Don't** replace or press down on a divot in the area of intended relief (once you have determined that area) this includes the relief area for an embedded ball.

4. **Do** plant your feet firmly and you may do a reasonable amount of digging with feet in sand or loose soil.

But Don't build your stance by doing the following:

- In a bunker on an uneven lie, excessively dig with one foot versus the other in order to level out your stance. or, knocking down sand in the bunker to level your stance.
- If you need to kneel to do a shot, don't put a towel or items under your knees to avoid getting wet or dirty. This is considered building your stance.

5. **Do** remove sand and loose impediments and repair damage on the putting green.

But Don't deliberately remove dew or frost or water on the putting green or anywhere else on the course.

6. **Do** remove loose impediments around your ball (without moving your ball). Remember, there is no limit on the size of a loose impediment. Even a boulder is a loose impediment if you are strong enough to move it.

But Don't:

- Don't pull weeds in front of or behind your ball that may be a distraction under the guise of "checking the wind direction".
- Move your ball if it ball lands on a loose divot or in a divot. You must leave it and cannot press down on it.

7. **Do** repair pitch or spike marks or even animal tracks on the green.

But Don't

- Make the same fixes on the course that are in front of your intended line. For example, don't repair that loose divot between you and the start of the green if you are going to play a low running shot up to the green.
- Tap down grass or repair ball marks on the fringe when you decide to putt from the fairway or fringe and you think they will interfere with the roll of your ball.



"No, there's nothing in the rule book that says you can't have a weed wacker in your bag. However, I still say it's cheating."

Q&A - Is a fixing a plugged ball, improving your lie?

No. In fact the revised golf rules of 2019 now state you get relief from an embedded ball anywhere on the course except in bunkers or penalty areas. The relief is to drop the ball within one club length behind the embedded ball, no closer to the hole.

As indicated in item 3, **Don't** repair the pitch mark until after you have taken relief and hit your shot.

What are Winter Rules/ Preferred Lies?

Winter Rules aka Preferred Lies are used when the golf course is saturated due to rain resulting in plugged and/or muddy balls. Under these rules the player may lift, clean and place their ball.

The rule for Preferred Lies may be for all season, hence the name Winer Rules or only for a round. When they are seasonal, a local rule is in place. The USGA rules has the following guidelines.

1. Usually limited to areas mown to fairway height of less, but can expand to general area (excludes bunker and penalty areas).
2. Specify the size of the relief area where the ball may be placed, from 1 scorecard length up to a club length.
3. The reference point for the relief area is the spot of the original ball.

Rounds normally valid for Handicap purposes are valid when played under Preferred Lies.