

YOUR GUIDE TO WINTER RULES

The summer might be over, but there are lots of things to love about autumnal and winter golf, not least the addition of preferred lies. However, there are a few things you need to know before you pick your ball up in the middle of the fairway...

When are winter rules being introduced? There is no set time, though the decision rests with the Committee who can introduce a Local Rule for preferred lies (also known as Winter Rules). Most courses in the UK implement a Local Rule from October 1 until April 30, but it's worth checking your club noticeboard for the status of the course before teeing off.

Where do winter rules apply? Any part of the general area cut to fairway height or less. This includes fringes, aprons and paths cut through the rough.

Do I have to mark my ball before picking it up? When taking relief, you're not required to mark the original spot before picking and cleaning your ball. However, it is recommended that you do so as marking the original spot helps in determining the reference point and relief area for taking free relief.

How far can I move my ball under preferred lies? The ball or another ball must be placed on a spot no nearer the hole (and in the general area) within a zone specified by the Committee, normally within six inches. However, some clubs specify a scorecard length or even a club length, so check in advance.

If I'm not happy with the lie, can I pick and place again? Your ball is in play once the ball you've placed stays on that spot. If you pick it up again, the rule is that you must replace the ball under one penalty stroke.

May I take free relief from a bunker which is flooded? You can take relief outside the bunker, but it will cost you a penalty stroke. For free relief, you need to find the nearest point of complete relief in the bunker no nearer the hole, from which point you can drop within one club length. If you are unable to establish a nearest point of complete relief due to temporary water, you may find a spot in the bunker where you have the least interference instead.

Am I entitled to free relief for an embedded ball in the rough? Yes, you can take free relief for a ball embedded anywhere in the general area (except in the sand). In taking relief, you must drop the original ball or another ball within one club-length of (but not nearer the hole than) the spot right behind where the ball was embedded.

If my ball lies in a penalty area and is surrounded by leaves, can I move them without penalty? This is another rule which changed in 2019. You are allowed to touch or remove a loose impediment, including leaves, sticks, worms and insects, anywhere on or off the course without penalty as long as you do not cause the ball to move. If it does move, the penalty is one stroke and the ball must be replaced on its original spot.

May I brush away a layer of ice from my line of play? Frost, much like dew, isn't classed as a loose impediment and as a result may be removed from the teeing area without penalty only when teeing off on that hole. In all other circumstances, you're not permitted to remove frost where it could improve the conditions affecting your stroke or stance.