

Snowmaking



TOP GUNS

Colorado is usually the state with the earliest opening day each year. This season, Loveland Resort opened on October 24, making it the first snow resort to open in the state. While the Centennial State is certainly blessed with abundant snowfall, what really makes this possible is snowmaking.

Snowmaking is done at resorts all around the world as a way to supplement natural snowfall and extend their seasons. While some mountains chose to go au naturel and stick with what they receive from the snow gods, the snowmaking process has proved absolutely instrumental in getting you on the slopes every October before riders anywhere else in the U.S.

The exact launch of snowmaking varies from resort to resort, but it usually starts pre-season and continues throughout winter. Conditions have to be exact—low temperatures and low humidity—so Colorado resorts rarely make snow

before the end of September in case of a warm-up.

"Loveland was one of the very first resorts to do it," explains Loveland's Events and Promotions Coordinator Duncan Maxwell. "We do it as often and as much as we can as long as the temperatures permit."

It's, however, a limited process due to water resources, electricity and machinery. "We only have snowmaking on a few select runs and the rest of it is all natural snowfall," said Duncan. "It adds a good base to our main runs, especially the base area."


While the machinery and labor involved can be very intensive, it only takes three simple ingredients to enhance your riding experience. Two of them you can probably already guess—water and air. The third is something called "Snomax®" Snow Inducer, an ice-nucleating protein derived from a bacterium called

Pseudomonas syringae. And while that last sentence might sound scary to the average snowboarder on the hill, it's actually easy to explain.

For water to freeze, energy must be removed to allow the particles to slow down enough to form little hexagon crystal structures. Snomax slows the water particles, thus jump-starting the freezing process. This is crucial because when snow gets blown out of snow blowers it needs to freeze before it hits the ground.

And no, this "*Pseudomonas syringae*" stuff isn't anything that you need to worry about. It's an organic bacterium that is found naturally in air and topsoil, so if you're a living, breathing, being it's something that you've already been exposed to.

Another interesting aspect about the snowmaking process is the people

A black and white photograph of a snowmaking machine on a snowy mountain slope. The machine is in the foreground, and a large, dense plume of snow is being blown out from its nozzle, filling the upper half of the frame. The background shows a snowy mountain landscape with some evergreen trees on the right side.

behind it. Loveland snow is made by Seasonal Labor Solutions, a New Zealand-based company. "They're the professionals, they do it all the time," said Duncan Maxwell. "It's a crew of about eight to ten that works long, intense hours. They're the real backbone behind our operation."

Snow isn't only made for pre-season grooming, it also allows Colorado resorts to build some of the biggest and best parks around. When the landings are tracked out and the jumps are looking a little worn, snowmaking allows terrain park managers to reconstruct and redesign throughout the season regardless of whether they've had recent snow or not. It really has an effect all over the mountain. So as resorts start opening and you finally start riding this season, you can be a better-informed rider since you now know all about the snow being shot out of machines alongside the runs.

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