

SCHEDULING MAINTENANCE PRIORITIES FOR TURF

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The challenges of today's Grounds Managers takes on many forms. Probably the most prevalent and time consuming, is the wear and tear our football game and practice fields are subjected to each and every season. It used to be that the compaction and demise of the turf was mainly concentrated between the 30's. Not so anymore. And of course, our challenges can take us onto softball, baseball and soccer fields as well.

Then of course, there are days when its 3 days before homecoming and a group, who wants to remain nameless, throws another curve ball at you, just to see how good you are. In this particular situation, a supplier in Clare was able to come through for us with a new 5" gooseneck to replace the twisted one. It was installed the day before the game.

Then there are the days when you feel like just throwing in the towel and starting over.

An absolute must for turf maintenance is aeration. Whether it's with a slicer like we have, a shatter tine machine like this one, or a plug and core machine like most people use. With the slicer we have, we can penetrate the turf about 5" depending on the soil moisture. As with any machine that penetrates your turf areas, mark or flag all irrigation heads. The four minutes spent doing that will save time money and a lot of frustration later.

You shouldn't be afraid to make multiple passes with your aerators either. We try to go at least 2 different ways each time we aerate. On our practice fields, we'll even go diagonally across the field to help alleviate the extreme compaction those areas are subject to.

The next priority should be your over seeding. A slit seeder like this Roger model does an excellent job drilling the seeds beyond the turf and thatch layer, right into the soil. The only drawback that a model like this has, is the cutter disk that proceeds the seed drilling disks also raises up thatch and any grass leaves which are in it's path. These clippings generally can be ignored, allowing the wind and mother nature to dissipate them. If they are extremely heavy, we pull a grass sweeper behind an easy-go, to quickly and efficiently remove them from the field. However, removal from the sideline area still requires the old pitch fork and pickup truck removal method.

Naturally, fertilizing should also be high on your priority list. Using the proper N.P.K. formula for your needs, at the proper time of the year, can greatly enhance your overall efforts. For our large areas we use this Viacon 3pt hitch spreader. Properly calibrated, it does a great job in a very short time.

If water is available, irrigating your turf to establish and maintain a strong and healthy turf is certainly a must.

Even though rolling turf areas can add to the compaction already present, we find that in some instances, it is the lesser of two evils. On our intermural fields especially, we will roll them before the spring softball season begins in order to eliminate some of the ankle getting ruts that still exist from the preceding falls, flag football season.

Periodically, you'll need to eliminate the soil buildup along your baselines and outfield edges. On the baselines, probably the best method is still the sod cutter, rake, shovel and wheel barrow method. We try to do this every 5 years. This last fall, we ended up retrieving over 5 yards of material along the base paths at just the baseball field.

On our softball fields, a box scraper and a good operator can accomplish the same task much quicker. By doing it more frequently, only the top layer of sod is removed so that in a short period of time, the sod will regenerate itself.

A box scraper can also be instrumental in moving the playing material around the infields. For fine tuning the skin infields, we use a small york rake and a 5 foot drag mat. This does a great job as long as the soil is fairly dry.

Proper field maintenance also includes accurate marking and lining. I'm sure most every grounds crew has built something like this to eliminate measuring each and every time. We like to use the compressed air painter also. A 5 lb tank of CO₂ goes a long way when you are marking baseball and softball fields. Making up a jig similar to this, also helps insure accurate and good looking yard lines. Even making up stencils for number and letters can guarantee good looking painting every time.

As the old saying goes, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure", hits the nail on the head even when it comes to grounds care. Placing these sheets of plywood down on this soft turf not only aided this crew in bleacher placement, but it also saved them from coming back and repairing the ruts they surely would have made.

So even when your coaches start yelling at you, and your grounds don't look like formal gardens, remember your main objectives are still to maintain safe, playable, and attractive facilities. So hopefully, you'll still have the time to relax and read a good book or kick back and enjoy a beautiful sunset.