

How Do You Do...?

How Do You Develop Your Topdressing Program?

Answered by Randy Frater, San Diego State University

A few years ago, we started out with a program to topdress once a year but that didn't work out due to time constraints. Now, we basically do it on an as needed basis. We have a total of 6 fields and the high profile fields are done about once every 2 years with the low profile fields generally not done at all.

We do, however, topdress every time after we re-sod, and after any construction or when a tournament or other outside use of a field leaves damage. Our football practice field is re-sodded every year inside the sidelines. We always core aerify before we topdress. Also, when we don't topdress after coring, we drag the plugs back in which offers some of the benefits of topdressing but on a much smaller scale. This is done on an average of once a month during the playing season and every 2 months in the off-season.

I started out using a fairly inexpensive topdressing material but had a real problem with rocks in it so now we're switching to masonry sand. I always start with a 1/2" layer over the entire turf area and modify as needed depending on the field. I don't like to add organic matter to my topdressing material and I always apply material that has the same texture (or coarser texture) as the soil itself.

Answered by Chris Langley, Norwich (CT) Navigators

Our field is sand-based with a 90% sand, 10% North Dakota Peat profile and the turf is 80% bluegrass and 20% ryegrass. During the baseball playing season, we host 71 home games and numerous other events. Therefore, I make it a practice to do my topdressing every fall.

The first step in my program is to core aerate - removing the cores. I then topdress with the same soil profile as is already on the field at 1 inch, 2 inches in the high traffic areas. After spreading the material with a topdresser, I then use a drag mat or screen to fill in the holes left by the aeration process. We follow this in a couple weeks with verti-cutting and slice seeding, broadcasting extra seed as needed in the worn, high traffic areas.

Answered by Boyd "Rob" Montgomery, CSFM, Sylvania (OH) Recreation

The facilities I take care of in Sylvania cover a broad range of soil types. At Pacesetter Park we have a heavy clay soil and down the road, at all our off sites, we range from sand to a nice loam soil. In developing a good topdressing program the first step is to understand what is under your turf. Soil analysis are crucial to this process. After you have identified the soil profile the next step is to locate a vendor in your area to supply a material that matches. You want a material that matches so you do not create layers in your soil profile.

We try to target topdressing the fields after the season has ended and we have aerated the fields. With 135 acres at one facility it is not very cost effective to topdress the whole facility. We generally concentrate on the travel soccer areas and any other area that needs it. My one luxury is that we rotate the fields every season on the facility, so we very rarely have the same wear patterns on any field.

When we do topdress, it is combined with aeration and seeding. Aeration is done with a machine that has hollow tines and slit tines on the same unit. Unless it's during the playing season, we leave the plugs to break down. During the playing season we sweep them up. I have found that leaving the plugs helps us control the thatch layer. We have a Mill Creek spreader for topdressing that helps us spread the material. Then we broadcast seed and use a drag mat or rake for good seed to soil contact.



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