



MY TURF WENT TO THE DOGS - Here's the Scoop on Dog Parks

By Jeff Cramer, CPWM

As grounds managers, we often receive requests for special projects. When our township governing body requested we plan, construct and maintain a “dog park” (off-leash area for dogs) I realized there were many new challenges – not the least was care of the turf.

When I announced the project to my staff, most, if not all, were concerned with the impact of pet waste on staff and equipment. Shortly after the opening of the park we realized that the pet waste was the least of our maintenance problems. Long-term care of the park's turf was our major battle.

Here are some suggestions you may want to consider before installing a dog park:

FACILITY DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

1. Visit other existing sites to determine impact on your maintenance program. Don't reinvent the wheel if you don't need to. You can see what is best for you by reviewing what works and doesn't work for other dog parks. Our facility was a one-acre site.
2. Choose better quality fencing materials to provide a safe environment for dogs and to reduce maintenance. Use largest wire core and thickest fabric coating, install a bottom tension wire and use heavier grade posts and rails.
3. Install a double-gated user entrance where owners can un-leash their pets.
4. Plan an equipment service gate of sufficient size for your turf equipment.
5. If a water source is available, install a freeze-proof hydrant convenient to the facility.
6. Do not plant trees or shrubs – they won't survive!
7. Other things to consider: sitting benches, bulletin board, shade canopy, port-a-johns.

PET WASTE CONTROL

8. Post user rules and pet waste regulations at several locations.
9. Install several self-serve pet waste clean-up mitten dispensers with covered and lined waste cans along the inner perimeter.

10. Solicit park users to help enforce self clean-up by owners. This provided excellent results for our facility. Additional enforcement by park rangers if available. This includes pet license enforcement, control of aggressive animals, etc.

TURF MAINTENANCE

11. Locate the facility in a well-drained area.
12. Our facility consisted of primarily K-31 fescue – the tall fescues provide the best wear tolerance.
13. Soil compaction, both the four-legged and two-legged kind, was the biggest problem, not pet waste. Aerate several times per season to help maintain a viable turf.
14. Raise cutting height to 3" – 3 ½".
15. Conduct soil tests to determine soil phosphorous (P), potassium (K), magnesium (Mg), calcium (Ca) and liming needs. Apply slow-release nitrogen (N) sources to provide 3-5 lbs Nitrogen per year.
16. Remove all sod at the entrance gate and replace with #10 cinders compacted over ¾" clean gravel – the turf will never survive here.
17. Use a nonselective herbicide containing glyphosate (e.g., Roundup) beneath the fence line. Keep the park closed during application until herbicide has dried.

For more information go to www.dogpark.com.

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