

Question & Answer

with Rutgers University

By Dr. Jim Murphy and Brad Park

Q: Currently our soccer fields are all perennial ryegrass, I believe the variety that we are using is suboptimal and the beating it takes every year concerns me. I've done some research and I'm of the belief that we should migrate from ryegrass to tall fescue. More specifically, from the NTEP tests, Falcon V, Shenandoah III and Shenandoah Elite all look like excellent varieties for sports fields since they do very well on the wear tests and have an excellent appearance.

My concern is the existing ryegrass. I understand it's very competitive so I'm worried about over seeding with tall fescue just to have the ryegrass choke it out in a year. Would it be necessary to apply Roundup to the perennial ryegrass before planting tall fescue?

If you feel it's impractical to switch to tall fescue do you have any current test data on ryegrass and/or Kentucky bluegrass NTEP wear tests? I believe that even if we stick with the ryegrass but just switch to a better variety conditions will improve.

If you do think switching to a tall fescue is a good idea would you recommend any specific varieties of Kentucky bluegrass to mix with it? I heard at the field day this week that seeding with a fescue/rye mix is a bad idea since the 10% rye will overtake the 90% fescue in a couple of years.

Basically, any seed recommendations you may have would be appreciated.

A: You've asked some very pertinent questions. You could attempt to slit seed or use an Aera-Vator to begin introducing tall fescue to the existing soccer fields once or twice a year. There is no guarantee of immediate success; however, overtime you may see some tall fescue become established. Perennial ryegrass is still the best choice for routine overseeding of high traffic areas like goal creases. I would not use a Kentucky bluegrass/perennial ryegrass mixture for the purpose of overseeding high traffic locations. Use a blend of 100% perennial ryegrass. There are varieties with improved wear tolerance, turf quality, and gray leaf spot resistance available (see discussion below).

In an ideal situation, to completely transition from perennial ryegrass to tall fescue, applying Roundup makes sense. However, field closure, access to irrigation, and renovation timing all enter into the equation. If you can't close the field, don't have access to irrigation, or can't seed between August 15 and September 30, I would not apply Roundup.

The tall fescue varieties you mentioned are all good varieties. Selecting a variety based on turf quality, brown patch susceptibility, and wear/traffic tolerance will provide you with a good choice for a sports field.

Regarding mixtures, if your goal is to have a tall fescue field, I would not mix perennial ryegrass with the tall fescue. If your goal is to have a Kentucky bluegrass field, I would not mix perennial ryegrass with the Kentucky bluegrass.

The question of tall fescue/Kentucky bluegrass mixtures is a good one and Dr. Jim Murphy and I are discussing performing some research in this area. Based on what I'm observing in our Hort Farm II tall fescue study, I am not convinced Kentucky bluegrass needs to be added to tall fescue - assuming tall fescue varieties are established with superior turf quality, brown patch resistance, and wear/traffic tolerance. It has been observed that tall fescue/Kentucky bluegrass mixtures gradually transition to predominantly Kentucky bluegrass, so there is a strong argument to limit the initial seeding to 100% tall fescue, assuming your long term goal is to have a tall fescue field.

Attached are three pdf documents detailing the research results from Hort Farm II in 2009 for Kentucky bluegrass, perennial ryegrass, and tall fescue. We applied wear to our perennial ryegrass test in September 2009 and the results are in the document. For the purposes of overseeding, I suggest selecting perennial ryegrass varieties based on turfgrass quality, gray leaf spot resistance (usually delineated by 'GLR' or 'GLSR'), and wear/traffic tolerance. - BP

Editor's note: The Kentucky bluegrass, perennial ryegrass, and tall fescue research results referenced above are available by contacting Brad Park (park@aesop.rutgers.edu).

Q: I read the fact sheet that Rutgers put out regarding infield mixes. [See: Skin Surface Selection and Management for Baseball and Softball Fields <http://njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/publication.asp?pid=FS1096>]. I am building a new baseball and softball field for the college facility that I manage in New England - where rain is always a factor in the spring. Drainage and playability in wet weather is a major concern. I know that clay is used as a binder and that too much sand produces an infield mix that breaks down too easily. If you use an angular sand instead of a round sand can you increase the sand percentage without breakdown being an issue? One of the local sand mines has a material which is made from crushed rocks; it is like a coarse sand and packs very well. I have used it previously for cart paths on golf course. I am wondering

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