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Circle No. 111 on Reader Inquiry Card
Practical solutions for multi-use fields

by Dale Getz
University of Notre Dame

At the University of Notre Dame, many of the athletic fields are used for practices and actual games, and we also have 18 acres of intramural fields used for softball, soccer, football, lacrosse and rugby.

Fields are heavily used from early spring through mid-October, with play normally completed by Dec. 1. The majority of our fields are in flat, windy areas. The turf holds its color and we've experienced no winter desiccation. Generally, we have snow cover most of the winter.

No. 1: aerate—Aeration is the most important practice in the maintenance program. It loosens the soil, relieves compaction and promotes root growth.

We core aerate, then drag the cores until approximately 1/2 to 3/4 of the soil filters back into the holes. We then apply seed and a starter fertilizer. We drag the field again, pulling the seed and remaining core soil into the holes.

If the thatch portion of the core is small, it can be left on the field to decompose. We pick up excess thatch debris using the high setting of a sweeper. If you can't use a sweeper, and you're satisfied that the seed has been well covered, you can blow excess thatch material from the field with a power blower. Work from the center of the field, moving the thatch to the perimeter where it can be raked up and removed.

Budget and personnel availability usually limit our aerification to once a year, in the fall.

Sports fields need a light layer of thatch to provide an extra cushion of protection against the wear of play. We power rake intramural fields from the hash marks out, when necessary. Heavy play reduces thatch build-up between the hash marks. We also power rake the thick, bluegrass softball outfield to reduce susceptibility to disease.

When standard aeration and overseeding procedures can't be completed, applying seed for the players to "cleat in" can provide adequate seed-to-soil contact.

All aeration, power raking and dethatching procedures are done prior to seeding. Though our optimum seeding span is from mid-August to the first of September, intramural fields are used every day during that period. Depending on the conditions, seed applied prior to Oct. 15 will still make fall growth here.

We've also had good results with dormant seeding. Seeds sprout in the spring, long before wet weather or lingering snow cover would allow field access for planting. Lighter early-spring field use allows the turf to be worked more of the polymer-coated, slow-release nitrogens into the program, but even with these materials, there is a certain flush of growth that we want to avoid during play periods.

No. 2: seed—We use perennial ryegrass for multi-use fields. Perennial ryegrass is up in 4 to 5 days, compared to 15 to 21 days for Kentucky bluegrass. With more than 5 percent perennial ryegrass in a blend, the aggressive rye will shade out the emerging bluegrass. Perennial rye takes abuse better, giving the turf toughness; bluegrass has better recuperative qualities, extending field life.

We use Scotts Perennial Ryegrass 100 Blend that contains 39 percent Accolade, 30 percent Pennant and 28 percent Ovation.

No. 3: fertilize—Dollar costs and personnel availability determine the fertilization program.

Generally, we apply a minimum of 3 to 4 pounds of nitrogen and 3 pounds of potash on the practice and intramural fields during the year. Annual soil testing has shown that we have adequate available phosphorus. Following overseeding, however, a starter fertilizer (8-15-24) supplies the needed boost of phosphorus.

Mid-July is the last major N application on fall sports fields to avoid growth spurts and overly lush turf. Excessive growth means clippings must be removed. Overly succulent turf seems to produce a slicker field. Our fertilization program resumes in mid-October. We plan to work more of the polymer-coated, slow-release nitrogens into the program, but even with these materials, there is a certain flush of growth that we want to avoid during play periods.

No. 4: weed control—A good stand of turf is the best defense against weeds. When chemical controls are necessary, we choose products that work well with the least detrimental impact on the environment.

Pre-emergence applications are used only on fields that won't be overseeded, and only from the hash marks to the field perimeter. A combination fertilizer/pre-emergence material is used to save labor. Post-emergence controls for grassy weeds are kept on hand, but we haven't had to use them.

Multiple striping patterns are an obvious necessity on multiple use fields.

continued on page 24

22 Landscape Management, August 1994
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Broadleaf weed control is most effective when used in the fall, as late as December first in northern Indiana. Easily-controlled weeds, such as dandelion and buckhorn, respond to lower application rates. On tough weeds, multiple application often can be avoided. Tender growth quickly absorbs the herbicide and actively growing roots distribute it more effectively.

On multi-purpose fields, broadleaf weeds are spot-treated as necessary in the spring. If weeds aren't treated prior to their prime blooming period, frequent mowing may keep them in check until fall treatment.

No. 5: mow—The practice and intra-mural fields are mowed primarily with a rotary mower because it's faster. If the blades are kept sharp, the rotary mower delivers a smooth, decent cut. There's no time—or need—to pick up clippings unless weather-interrupted mowing produces excessive amounts.

No. 6: irrigate—All Notre Dame fields have automatic irrigation systems. Even on low-budget facilities, irrigation systems pay for themselves with the flexibility they provide in maintenance procedures.

—Dale Getz is athletic facilities manager for the University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Ind. He's an active member of the National Sports Turf Managers Association (STMA) and is college/university director for the Midwest Chapter of the STMA.

**Market your advantages**

- Competing against the multi-million-dollar advertising budgets of larger companies can be near impossible. But small businesses have two marketing advantages, according to the National Association for the Self-Employed:

  1) You can speak directly to your audience in their language. Your advertising can focus on local concerns and answer local needs. Larger companies must focus on mass appeal.

  2) Because small businesses concentrate on a specific local or vertical group, they can better focus their advertising and public relations campaigns.

  Unlike large corporations, small businesses can hand deliver flyers. Spot advertising in weekly shoppers is inexpensive and very local in scope.

  Hosting a special event creates goodwill and promotes your sales. Large companies do special events for name recognition, which does not directly affect sales.

  For more information, phone (800) 232-6273.

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**The key to quality: 'a few good people' with varied tasks**

- A quality company must have quality employees, insists Barclay Bullock of Portland, Ore.

  "If we pay a higher wage and compensation package, we'll attract people that are more dedicated to the customer," says Bullock. "The customer gets better service and the landscape company succeeds. That's why we pay a higher wage than the industry average, and we provide benefits like medical, dental and vacation time."

  Now, seven years after founding his landscape company, known as Barclay's Gardens Inc., Bullock is even more firm in his belief.

  "People take a lot of pride in their landscape here," says Barclay. "They will pay for quality work. If you can combine that with a reputation for service, and deliver what you say you can, you can write your own ticket."

Barclay began his landscape company on just that premise seven years ago. He also relied on the customer-driven, day-to-day service skills he practiced as a former ChemLawn technician and manager in Portland, Seattle and, finally, Long Beach. In fact, it was his six-month sojourn in Long Beach that chased him from lawn care and into his own enterprise back in Portland.

"We're getting to the point where we do our own brick work, where we do our own water features. We don't do a lot of carpentry yet, but we're starting to do more of it. I think the employees enjoy doing different things," he explains.

"Actually, a landscaper is a plumber. He's an irrigation specialist. He's an electrician because we put in night lighting," continues Bullock. "He's a grader. He needs to know carpentry, stone work, and that's in addition to putting in plants. This is one of the most technically challenging industries in the United States.

Certainly, there's a market for quality landscaping in Portland, says Barclay. After all, the city's nickname is "The Rose City."

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GROWTH PRODUCTS

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“I was used to residential service because of ChemLawn. Actually, I love working with homeowners and residential work has provided us with a nice base.

“We do very little commercial,” explains Barclay. “And, even though we’ve built this business pretty quickly, it’s built on small but solid building blocks. We’re not going to lose one client tomorrow and hurt our business.”

Portland’s Waterfront Park gets facelift from one of six Barclay’s Garden crews.

But keeping every client satisfied, impossible as it seems, is crucial to Barclay’s Gardens which relies on referrals and word of mouth.

“Our marketing is our image—clean trucks, uniformed employees, how we take care of each customer, our response time, our follow up,” adds Barclay. “The other strength I think we have is in our relationship with landscape architects. Often they ask us to bid their work. They’re looking for someone who’s competent, who will put in their design as they designed it, and follow up and take care of their customers.”

Barclay finds himself delegating more and more day-to-day chores—“I don’t need to decide whether we need a Toro or a Honda mower. The crews can decide that—as he builds relationships through the Oregon Landscape Contractors Association and the Associated Landscape Contractors of America.

“I never forget that this company is the work of a lot of good people’s efforts. I might be leading it, but I can never do it by myself.”

Ken Meyer of Barclay’s Gardens prepares residential property for a new lawn.

Help customers conserve water and have attractive lawns and landscapes with irrigation system advice and service.

The first challenge for the landscape pro is to convince that customer to get a quality system initially, a system that will function properly for years.

Residential clients, particularly, will appreciate this. Their appreciation will grow year after year as you help to keep the system operating efficiently and effectively.

Here are five irrigation services to provide to these customers:

1) Timer control adjustment. Ideally, watering should take place between 2 a.m. and 7 p.m. Evaporation is greatest while watering during midday.

Watering in late afternoon or early evening creates conditions that increase the likelihood of lawn diseases.

2) Sprinkler head adjustment. Dowsing driveways and sidewalks wastes water. Sometimes it’s also a safety hazard.

3) Line and sprinkler head repair. Some of the factors leading to line and sprinkler damage—freeses, plows, improper winter maintenance.

4) Rain sensor recalibration. Rain sensors, an excellent idea for all systems, guarantees that the system doesn’t duplicate nature’s work, nor creates extra expense or problems by overwatering.

5) Winter maintenance. Blow out the system to remove 75 percent of the water and shut down the clock to avoid accidental damage during the winter.

If you follow these procedures year after year, your client’s irrigation system should provide many years of reliable service and beautiful grounds.

—Paul Possluzny is operations administrator for Coronis Landscaping, a Nashua, N.H.-based full service landscaping and landscape design firm.
Dressing up your financial statements

When you must prepare financial statements for someone's eyes other than your own, first read them and see if they are telling the story you want.

by Dan Saunier

You, as a businessman, on occasion may have to provide financial information to outside parties. Generally speaking, you will only do this when you have no choice (i.e., the government) or when you want something.

In the case of government reporting, we suggest the minimum. Give them what they can legally ask for and ignore the rest. Too much information is worse than too little information.

The other times you provide information, you are trying to get something. You may be trying to establish new or additional lines of credit, enticing new ownership contributions, or simply showing that you are capable of handling a lease commitment. In each case, you want the person reading these financial statements to be impressed with your business.

In most cases, you need the details of your financial situation. For instance, for new projects, you want to be able to determine their financial impact, in which case the “details” are really important.

Details, however, are not necessarily needed when you want to impress other people.

The two main statements are the income statement (revenues and expenses) and the balance sheet (assets and debts).

Income statements—The rules for preparing income statements differ from those of preparing balance sheets for outside eyes. Here are some tips:

1) Reduce details as much as possible. Consolidate the operating or income statement. The key numbers are sales, gross profit, inventory, wages, rents and other operating-type numbers.

There is no need to separate all of the different levels of payroll such as ownership and management. These numbers can be provided separately, if needed. You should also strive to reduce the number of lines of sales—consolidate it to one line if you can. You want to show that you have a viable operation, not to invite comment on a sideline sales category.

2) Separate core activities. Sometimes you’ll need to separate items. Few businesses work on one idea at a time. They often mix different activities into the same operation. Examples of this include subleasing, renting signs, wholesale activity and sideline activities.

When one of these is combined to the core activity of, say, a mower rental business, you hide the true operational results of the main business. The other person reading your statement is not interested in sidelines; he or she is interested in the manner in which you make your money.

continued on page 28

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Landscape Management, August 1994 27
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Sometimes these little adventures cost us money, or are still in the development stages. This being the case, they make the core business look bad—when, in fact, it is doing well enough to support these outside activities. You need to show the reader of the income statement how well you are doing with the main business and how much it contributes to bottom-line expenses. You can show these other activities below the line called income from operations.

3) Use comparative information. Many outside readers are trying to determine trends in your business. Show growth rates and management accomplishments.

Commonly, companies show the prior year in their statements. There is nothing wrong with the consolidation of a number of years on one page. Here you can see how the company has grown and the cost controlling measures that you may have put in it.

Balance sheets—Not all of the same rules apply for balance sheets. Here some additional detail can be useful, but do not try to overwhelm the reader with too many details. Some tips:

1) Show the various assets you actually have. Show the key current items such as inventory, accounts receivable and cash. This will show the outside reader how liquid you are. Show your payables split among remittances required by governments and those to outside trade suppliers. If any money is due to the principals of the company, show these separately.

2) Reduce details in the fixed asset area to the main categories of: land, building, equipment and leasehold improvements. Group all of the accumulated depreciation and amortization together.

Outside readers should be able to easily extract how much you own and in what general categories it exists. They should be able to see how much you owe to outsiders and what type of outsiders they are. Finally, they should be easily able to determine how much you have invested in the business.

In the balance sheet, there is a delicate line of too much information and too little. Help the reader understand where your business is without trying to show them where every piece of stock is located.

Some don'ts—Avoid—at all costs—inflating sales and income to impress someone. First, the numbers will stop making sense to a skilled reader; second, by exaggerating, you might be opening yourself up to legal action. Certainly you are permanently losing all credibility with the outside reader.

Next, while non-cash expenses such as depreciation is tempting to exclude (after all, it does not result in cash), resist it. A skilled reader knows it should be there, and in its absence, will make assumptions that are not in your favor.

Resist the transfer of expenses from the income statement to the balance sheet. Accounting rules can tell you what expenses can be capitalized, but readers on the whole are looking for the "hard" assets. Certainly, set up a legitimate prepaid expense (where the value of the expense extends into future periods), but do not overdo it. Readers catch on.

Read your own statements and see if they are telling the story you want them to.

—The author is chairman of Padgett Business Services. This is one in a series of articles he is writing about accounting for LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT.
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Fall fertilization: going beyond N, P and K

Provide a solid base for next year’s fertility program by giving attention to elements related to soil structure, not just turfgrass growth.

by Dave Wilber

Fall is the time to examine, evaluate and, if necessary, make changes to your turf fertilization program.

Fall fertility regimens are different in that they do not always have to do with the common fertilizers we may use to stimulate plant growth during the growing season. Late season fertilization means that we are in a position to feed and work on the soil.

As the summer heat winds down, turfgrass managers naturally take a breather from the dog days that have had them cornered during the past few months. Turf recovery is evident, and in most cases, the problems of the summer can disappear as the cooler nights set in.

Fall is the time to test and evaluate. Take a soil test of areas that were good and areas that were poor during the season, perhaps in addition to your regular testing program. The analysis is important as a first look at the balance of the soil after the past season’s fertilization and irrigation.

The fall soil test may and probably will show a difference in soil cations, other than what is listed above.

Fall is the perfect time to adjust these numbers. Adjustment is based on the cation exchange capacity of the soil (CEC). A low CEC soil needs fewer actual pounds of soil fertilization than a high CEC. Over application may hurt, and under application may not be sufficient. A soil with a CEC of 4 may hold only 1600 lb./a of calcium as opposed to the 20 CEC soil that holds 8000 pounds of the same calcium.

Always ask if the recommendations are leading toward balanced soils. If they are not, then ask what the goal may be. A good program will move toward improvement.

The importance of lime—A soil low in calcium should be limed. Lime is misunderstood, and should be viewed as more than just a pH adjuster.

The pH of a soil can be raised by applying any positively-charged material. Lime was used in the early days of agriculture to raise the pH of soils sufficient in calcium.

Dolomite lime supplies both calcium and magnesium. Simply using pH as a guide to soil amendments is not enough, and fails in most cases to bring a soil to balance. In his work, Dr. Albrecht found that a balanced soil also had a pH of 6.2 to 6.8, regardless of where it came from.

Excessive sodium can lead to a high pH. If calcium is low, lime and gypsum can be used to remove sodium from the exchange sites. In this case, we lim the high pH soil to balance the soil.

Potassium is rarely found in excess and can be one of the most overlooked materials available for fall application. During the season, most fertilization has a goal of an equal amount of potassium and nitrogen applied. This may not offset a deficient condition and require additional potassium. The resulting cold and heat tolerance are well worth the money spent.

Late-season fertilization should be focused on the development of a solid base to support the efforts of fertilization during the following season. This may mean looking at fertilizer elements that are related to soil structure and not just turfgrass growth. There should be no guesswork with good soil testing.

Examine the soil carefully. The time spent will pay off in the early days of spring and the hot days of next summer.

—The author is an independent consultant specializing in soil and plant nutrition. A former golf course superintendent, Wilber is a member of the Brookside Laboratory Association. He writes from Grass Valley, Calif.