

MANAGING TURFS IN HEAVY TRAFFIC AREAS

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At Oakland County Parks and Recreation we are generally geared up to a yearly cycle of maintaining turf in certain heavy use areas knowing full well that at the end of the season we can plan on renovating or extensively overseeding that turf. In a lot of the turf areas we maintain, we had no control over the physical make up of the turf and soil. However, in the event we are involved from the beginning stages of construction on a playing field, tee, green or other heavy use areas, particular attention is paid to the 3 following items:

1. Size should be evaluated on a basis of anticipated use and budget limitations, however we seldom come up with an area that is too large.
2. For subsurface drainage we are going more to 70-80% sand content in our soil mix; this usually makes for a tougher time in establishing turf but usually pays off in a few years.
3. Surface drainage is usually evaluated on how much slope can be tolerated for practical use of the area.

Our maintenance program in our heavy traffic areas differs from our normal areas in the following ways: Fertilizing - As a normal practice we apply 1 lb N per 1000 square feet each growing month. On our high use areas we apply 1/2 lb N per 1000 square feet every two weeks. This lighter, more frequent application helps reduce the chance of burn due to extensive use of the turf after fertilizing and I believe it makes for a more even feeding of the turf. Mowing - We find it important to follow a strict schedule on mowing heavy use areas, never removing more than the 1/3 of the grass blade at a time so as to cause additional stress to the turf. Irrigation - All our heavy traffic areas are not irrigated but in the areas that are, we feel it is important to make sure there is no standing water and the turf has had adequate time to drain off before use. In fact, we find that a dry turf will survive better after a hard days use than will the wet turf. Aeration - This cultivation practice has proven to be one of the main techniques in helping the turf to survive. We try to spike weekly and core isolated areas as need. Traffic Control - In this I mean the techniques we use to redirect park users if possible to less worn areas, keeping park users off of wet soggy turf. Alternating heavy use areas, and keeping traffic off as much as possible in the spring when the turf is still not growing or fighting back through growth. As I mentioned earlier we generally count on renovating or overseeding most of our turf in the fall that has been subject to heavy traffic. In our renovating we seldom use any type of chemical that would destroy the existing turf, however a lot of the turf is stunned due to the extensive cultivation in the bare areas. If the turf is thinned to 50% or less of the original turf we rely extensively on power overseeders to incorporate the seed into the existing turf. The importance of the seed being buried in the soil is the main reason we use these power overseeders.

We primarily stick to a bluegrass-ryegrass seed mixture in the fall. In the spring if we see the need for overseeding again we normally go with a straight ryegrass in our heavy traffic areas. We use ryegrass because of its quick cover. There are quite a few ryegrasses on the market that have excellent turf qualities.

In conclusion, every fall when we survey the packed down, worn out turf recreation areas that we manage, hopefully we can look to the positive side and say its obvious that people enjoyed themselves here. If we can get the turf back in suitable condition they will be back next season.