

# AERATING: A NEW APPROACH

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The benefits of aerating a sports field are generally well understood by Turf Managers. The process involves puncturing the hard upper crust and permitting air and oxygen to reach the root zone. Air and water become once again available in the growing medium. Plants that can breathe and drink with their roots will thrive and thicken especially if the aeration process is accompanied by a fertilizer application.

Unfortunately for most grounds keepers, aerating the playing field is a once a year operation. The process is too disruptive and too cumbersome. It is time consuming to aerate an entire football field and it is also time consuming to break up the cores and remove the residues. Aeration is like major surgery: it is difficult for the doctor and even harder on the patient. After all that work, who needs the complaints from the players about the disruption to their sport.

Much of this unpleasantness can be avoided by taking a new approach to aeration. It is not necessary to aerate an entire field every time one aerates. There are large portions of the field that receive very little play and, as a result, are not compacted and do not need to be aerated more than once a year. Instead, aeration should be concentrated on the heavier play areas, such as centre field and in front of the goal posts on football fields. Don't wait for the grass to die in these areas before bringing

out the aerator. Every grounds keeper, every turf manager knows the heavy wear areas on the fields long before these areas show signs of thinning. I suggest that in mid summer, weeks before the playing season commences, potential wear

that at least some of the seed falls straight into the tiny holes. Here the seed will germinate and help thicken the stand. This process should be repeated every two or three weeks well into the playing season. The soil in the heavy play



*Nigel Rennie, left, demonstrating the Multicore Aerator at Penn State Turf Plots to Dr. J. Duich, Bill Black, Superintendent Congressional Country Club, Washington, D.C. and Ann Witteveen, Turf Management Lecturer, Humber College.*

areas are outlined with spray paint to designate these portions of the field for special treatment. Now, bring out a small self-propelled aerator with half-inch tines at two inch spacings and aerate to a depth of 2-3 inches. Before matting in the cores apply a seed mixture at the heavy rate of 20lbs/1000 sq. ft. The seed mixture should include equal parts of Rye, Fescue, and Blue grasses. Try some of the newer SR rye grass varieties which have been repeatedly proven superior. Use a drop spreader when applying the seed. It is important

areas will be well cultivated as a result of this treatment and a new crop of seed will constantly germinate to keep the stand of grass thick. Eventually you may lose the battle at centre field to keep the field playable but it may not be until the last game of the season and you can relax in the knowledge that you gave it your best shot. Then, let an old fashioned Canadian winter, with plenty of freezing and thawing action, aerate the rest of the field while you relax in the Caribbean.

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