



Improving Your Turf in Fall

DR. ZAC REICHER • SUMMARIZED BY MICHAEL BLADON

Dr. Reicher gave a very interesting talk and in the time frame allotted, answered many questions which he invited from the audience. The following is a synopsis of his session.

Fertilization Recommendations

Fertilizer treatments applied in August and September help improve turf density and lateral growth of bluegrasses and bentgrasses which spread by rhizomes and stolons. There is very little vertical growth during fall months and fertilizing then improves density. Slow release forms of nitrogen (N) are preferred for early fall applications, but if your budget doesn't allow it, fast release forms are better than no fertilizer.

Final fertilizer applications should be applied close to the last mowing when the grass is still green. There is a fair amount

of time between when the turf stops growing and when it turns brown. Late fall fertilizing increases the amount of carbohydrates built up for winter survival and early spring greenup. Don't apply fertilizer to dormant areas; turf must be active and photosynthesizing to reap fertilization benefits.

For late fall applications, it's important to use fast release forms of N so it is taken up by the plant immediately. Fast release forms like urea or ammonium nitrate are fine, plus they're cheap! Rates of 1.0 to 1.5 lbs N/1,000 sq. ft. should be used at this time. An immediate green colour will be seen and it lasts.

What you do in September, October and November translates into how well your grass will survive next summer. The effects of good fall management practices will also be seen next spring with faster



greenup and good root growth. Do not apply fertilizer in spring until after the spring growth flush, because you will get all kinds of top growth at the expense of root growth. If you must go out, employ a very light application of nitrogen at 0.5 lbs N/1,000 sq. ft.

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Don't forget the obvious in that spreader patterns are also important when applying fertilizer. Be sure to calibrate the spreader and your overlap – with a rotary spreader is 50% where the edge of your pattern should touch the spreader trackers from the previous pattern. Be careful with potassium as it is overrated – only apply if a soil test indicates you need it.

Soccer fields with considerable wear can handle three fall applications: after the heat in August, and 1 lb. in September and October. The risk with this fertilizing strategy is that it will increase snow mold, but this risk is normally justified on areas under severe wear pressure. Slow release should be used for the first two applications and fast release for the last one.

Reduce your fertilization rates and you have to reduce your expectations. Your best bet is to let the grass plants dictate fertilization. If you see clover, dollar spot, red thread or rust in your fields, you have too little nitrogen. If you have perennial brown patch, pythium, snow mold and/or *Poa annua* problems, your fertility might be too high. You can't make up for missed fall applications in spring. Furthermore, leaching is not as much of a problem in fall because plants take up the fertilizer immediately – but that doesn't give us license to over-apply or apply carelessly.

Fall Seeding

Though Kentucky bluegrass is the preferred grass in lawns and athletic fields, it's not very competitive as a seedling. Perennial ryegrass is easier to overseed because of its tremendous competitiveness as a seedling, but it is more sensitive to diseases and does not spread like Kentucky bluegrass. When overseeding thinned out grasses, Kentucky bluegrass will work fine if it is a very thin turf and the area will not be trafficked for six growing weeks or more. But if the turf is "in play" and is needed constantly, use perennial ryegrass. Though many people use sod for a quick fix during a playing season, newly laid sod doesn't handle traffic well and overseeding may be a better choice.

The best time to seed is August, but don't seed any later than mid-September. If time restraints are a problem, then do it

in September. A rule of thumb is if the field is seeded the first of September under normal conditions, it will be available for play by the first week of June. Dormant seeding works very well combined with aggressive aerification at the end of the year.

Seeding at the wrong time of year is always a problem with weed control. Most herbicides have some kind of restriction when it comes to seedlings. Whether you spray over the top or prior to seeding, make sure you read the label carefully because every herbicide differs in its restrictions with use around seedlings. The best way to control weeds in seedlings is through mowing and most people don't mow a new stand soon enough. In order to maximize establishment, good seed to soil contact is required. The application of high phosphorous fertilizers prior to

seeding will also help establishment.

Finally, Dr. Reicher does not recommend perennial rye when establishing new fields. He recommends 100% Kentucky bluegrass blends instead. He maintains recommended seeding rates are too high. Regardless of the seeding rate, a turf stand can only support a given number of seedlings.

In terms of fall broadleaf weed control, Dr. Reicher referred to a Michigan State University study showing you can still get great weed control in the late fall as long as the target weeds are green and photosynthesizing. They will take up the herbicide but will show little effect only to die during the winter. Where aerification is concerned, you cannot kill turf or over aerify provided you are not doing it at 90F. Lastly, he recommended keeping mowing heights the same year round. ■

Industry News • STA New Members

Executive Director Appointed

Ken Cousineau, CAE, has been selected to succeed Vince Gillis, CAE, as Executive Director of the Canadian Golf Superintendents Association. Mr. Cousineau, who assumed his new duties February 11th, brings to the CGSA strong association management experience, both in managing internal administrative functions and external relationships with government and stakeholders.

Breeding and Evaluation of Turfgrasses Technical Conference

May 1-2, 2002. Organized by the Sports Turf Research



Institute, the conference, being held in West Yorkshire, will interest all turfgrass breeders and evaluators, turf scientists and other turf professionals.

A panel of 8 speakers will present 10 conference sessions. Further details can be obtained from Anne Wilson, Head of External Affairs, STRI,

telephone 01274 565131, email info@stri.co.uk.

TPI Confirms England for 2003 Winter Conference

For the first time in its 35-year history, the Mid-Winter Conference and Exhibition of Turfgrass Producers International will be held outside of North America. The 2003 meeting will occur from February 26-28 in Birmingham, England. Open to everyone in the green industry, anyone interested in receiving information about exhibiting or attending should contact TPI at 800-405-8873 or 847-705-9898, email can be sent to info@TurfGrassSod.org.

Welcome New STA Members

- Jim Nelson, City of Kitchener, ON
- Tim Ernst, City of Kitchener, ON
- Jorg Hermanns, Hermanns Contracting Ltd., Schomberg, ON
- Laurie Weatherall, City of Ottawa, ON
- Bruce Warren, Parc Downsview Park, Toronto, ON