

Question and Answer with Rutgers University

By Dr. James Murphy and Brad Park

Q: In the spring I manage fields used for baseball and lacrosse; field hockey and soccer in the fall. I have been under the impression that "quick dry" is an agent that should only be used on clay surfaces. I've been told that it is not good to use this product on turf because it renders the soil difficult to germinate new grass. The field hockey program practices and plays games in the outfield of the varsity baseball field. After a week of practices, the grass in front of the goal areas is reduced to dirt. I am reluctant to put "quick dry" in those areas when it rains for the aforementioned reason. Is my information on the use of "quick dry" products wrong?

A: You are correct to be cautious about applying "quick dry" products on turf areas. Extensive use of some quick dry products will eventually "seal" the soil in these areas ultimately making the problem worse. Moreover, you should include seed in any topdressing of these areas with drying agents, otherwise the bare areas will not fill-in (recover) with grass. I recommend that you apply (broadcast) 2 pounds of perennial ryegrass seed per goalmouth per week through the remainder of the season. You should observe some emergence within 10-14 days (possibly earlier) after a good rain or irrigation. Emerging plants will get trampled but it is a numbers issue - the more seed you apply the greater the chance some plants will survive and

ultimately fill-in the worn out areas. We see a number of facilities that are highly successful with this type of regular overseeding.

There are 2 types of granular materials that would be acceptable to apply to these goalmouths and function to "dry" these areas without adversely affecting soil properties: (1) sand or (2) high-temperature, kiln-fired, clay or diatomaceous earth products. Sand will be the least expensive option but will not "soak-up" as much water as the kiln-fired products. If you choose to use sand, order a medium-coarse or medium sand (size); do not use concrete or mason sands.

The kiln-fired products need to be fired at very high temperatures so that the granules will not slake (breakdown) and form a sticky, clayey mess over time. These granular products are very hard and are roughly sand sized (depending on product and size grade); thus, these materials will behave much like sand except that these materials will soak up more water than sand. The hardness of the granules prevents slaking (breakdown) allowing these materials to work into the soil much like sand and provide similar benefits over time - a coarser and less muddy surface.

If cost is problem, you could consider blending sand with kiln-fired-granular product.

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(continued from page 8)

Q: I am having a problem with annual bluegrass on my main football field. We have always had it in a few spots but this year it just took over the field and it died off about a month ago. Naturally everyone is in a tizzy over it because our field always looks good. I've heard you speak on the subject a few times so that is why I am reaching out to you. If there is any advice or literature you have and can send to me I would really appreciate it. I really need some help.

A: Currently, there are no practical chemical options to address annual bluegrass on football fields, particularly given the need to continually apply seed to the heaviest trafficked sections of the field (i.e. between the hash marks). Keep an eye out for the registration of Tenacity Herbicide for sports fields. It's currently available for sod farms and golf courses and will provide preemergence control of annual bluegrass AND allows some seeding flexibility.

In the meantime, I suggest seeding the sections of the annual bluegrass-collapsed sections of the field with perennial ryegrass. A gray leaf spot resistant blend of three to five varieties would be appropriate. Don't simply buy a 'Sports Turf Mix' - buy a blend of 100% perennial ryegrass. It's important to get these areas established with perennial turfgrass cover (i.e. perennial ryegrass) before the annual bluegrass re-encroaches (either from seed or from existing plants which have collapsed, formed a void, and appear 'dead'). Any targeted core aeration, core re-incorporation, and slit seeding of perennial ryegrass will aid in the establishment of perennial ryegrass in these locations. Try to seed at 8.0 to 10.0 lbs seed per 1000 sq

ft. As the football season continues, use a rotary spreader to apply more perennial ryegrass seed and allow the athletes to cleat-in the seed. You may even want to seed at the conclusion of the season.

Q: We are interested in receiving advice regarding a baseball infield that has been neglected for years. It is a dirt infield and we would like to put down a grass infield. Any suggestions on where to start?

A: Although not as aesthetically pleasing as a turfgrass infield, dirt infields are generally easier to maintain and, in most cases, are the most appropriate for municipal/parks and recreation facilities. Turfgrass infields, while appropriate for higher-maintenance facilities, often develop lips rather quickly due to mismanagement, a lack of management, or both.

Generally, neglected skin surfaces most benefit from lip renovation/removal and a management program that involves the elimination of high and low spots through routine grooming (without moving infield mix into nearby turf areas), attention to the pitcher's mound and home plate areas, and the avoidance of adding infield mix on an annual basis - which gradually raises the infield elevation relative to the surrounding areas.

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