

Frankly my dear... I'll take grass

Both artificial turf and natural grass have advantages for the baseball player, but 90% of today's players don't prefer one to the other, says Hall of Fame outfielder **Billy Williams**. Grass, however, is more likely to sustain a career.

"We always say that artificial turf takes two or three years off a player's career," said Williams at the third annual Midwest Sports Turf Institute in Glen Ellyn, Ill. The first to go are a player's knees, says Williams, victims of continuous pounding on a hard surface.

He also reminded groundskeepers that "A good ground crew can mean the difference between a home team winning an extra five or six ballgames a year."

Match your turf with your sport

When planning to put grass down on your football, soccer, or baseball field, the most important characteristics to look at are a cultivar's growth and recovery rate, traffic and compaction tolerance, disease resistance and cultural intensity level, says Tom Voigt, assistant horticulturist at the University of Illinois, Urbana. Here's how Voigt sees each through the eyes of a groundskeeper in the Midwest:

Kentucky bluegrass has a good recovery rate, medium traffic tolerance (which can be improved by combining it with perennial ryegrass), medium to high compaction tolerance, medium disease resistance and a medium cultural intensity level.

Perennial ryegrass has a slow recovery rate but good traffic and compaction tolerance. "The newer varieties can be mowed lower and have improved disease resistance and cold/heat tolerance compared to the older varieties," says Voigt.

Tall fescue, despite a poor recovery rate, has good traffic and compaction tolerance, high disease resistance and medium cultural intensity and germination rate. A mix of 90% tall fescue and 10% Kentucky bluegrass may lead to one variety dominating the other. Voigt suggests mixing Tall fescues with a less aggressive bluegrass such as Bronco.

Creeping red fescues have a low traffic/compaction tolerance and disease resistance level. "I don't think fine fescues are going to play a big role in sports turf in the Midwest," concluded Voigt.

Creeping bentgrass, the "Rolls Royce" of the bentgrasses, recovers well but has poor traffic and compaction tolerance and low disease resistance. "This is a grass that you have to constantly work with to be successful."

breaks down over a period of three years on a schedule of 60% the first year, 30% the second year and 10% the third year. Urea formaldehyde can be finely ground to a powder to be sprayed as a suspension.

IBDU—Isobutylidene diurea is a slightly soluble nitrogen compound available in a coarse and fine granular form. It is a slightly soluble material releasing a little nitrogen each time it is exposed to water. As long as water is not freezing, it releases nitrogen independent of temperature. All of its nitrogen will be released the year of application.

SCU—Sulfur-coated urea (SCU) is not a truly water insoluble nitrogen source, but it is considered a controlled-release material. Water soluble urea is sprayed with molten sulfur and then sealed with wax. Since these coatings vary in thickness and imperfections, the coatings gradually break

Turfgrasses do not show the dramatic visual response to potassium that they do to nitrogen.

down over a 12- to 14-week period. This material is only applied as a granular fertilizer.

Potassium carriers—Muriate of potash (KCl) and sulfate of potash (K_2SO_4) are the two most commonly-used sources of potassium (K). Muriate is much cheaper, but it has almost double the salt index of K_2SO_4 . In sprayed materials where salt index is critical, the sulfate form is preferred. Often, high soil pH makes K_2SO_4 the preferred potassium source in a quality fertilizer.

Application

Application equipment is designed to apply granular fertilizers, liquids and suspensions. Insoluble fertilizers can be ground to a powder and sprayed as a suspension.

Sprayed fertilizer does not have to be strictly fast-acting. Since insoluble, slow-acting fertilizers can be suspended in solution, then can be applied by spraying.

Water soluble urea can be applied as a granular material or sprayed. The difference in quality between liquid or granular fertilizers is not how they are applied but what's in them.

Becoming familiar with the variety of ingredients available in a fertilizer will help you buy wisely and make the most effective use of your fertilizer dollar. **LM**