

Controlled release solves lazy turf green-up

How do you cope with tired turf, a rising demand for recreational land, and a frozen budget? Frank Dorsey, superintendent of the parks and recreation department of Nashua, N.H., was recently faced with those questions.

"Fifty thousand people use our fields every day from early April to mid-December, and we tried everything we could to keep them safe and playable," says Dorsey, who tends 648 acres. Included in his list of responsibilities are a multi-purpose stadium, a softball and soccer complex and a playground with a pool, picnic site and band shell.

Looking for solutions

"Our first choice was to take the fields out of play for a year," says Dorsey, a decision which was ill-timed due to economic factors. "With the population growing up to 10 percent a year and the region's economy prompting people to turn to low-cost recreational activities, we wound up adding lights and playing areas to existing fields instead."

Aerification and scarification



Frank Dorsey, right, of Nashua, N.H., found that the Once fertilizer product brought deep green color and even, sustained growth to recreational areas.

were the last resorts, culturally.

"Instead of rebuilding a field or tearing out damaged roots as we might have done with more

resources," Dorsey explains, "we overseeded worn areas and bare spots without disturbing the existing mature grass."

A 33-3-10 water soluble fertilizer applied every August, November and May brought short-term results. Spring fertilization created a similar temporary green-up, plus extra mowing and uneven clippings.

Results all season long

A visit to a New Hampshire parks and recreation trade show provided Dorsey with a solution. Once, a controlled release fertilizer described as an "environmentally-sensitive product" by its manufacturer, Grace-Sierra, released nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium continuously for up to a full season with only a single application.


Unlike any slow release product Dorsey had used previously, Once has a special-release mechanism. The nutrients respond to ground temperature rather than water, pH or bacteria.

"Our growth was even and sustained. We sharply decreased our mowing, and our disease problem was a lot less than in the past," says Dorsey.

"Because this new technology eliminates the blishes and fading that leaves turf vulnerable to disease," says Dorsey, "we're able to maintain a higher level of vegetation, which allows a sensitive plant like bluegrass to thrive." **LM**

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