



## Tips from the pros on marking athletic fields

by Steve and Suz Trusty

**Stripes and lines should be attractive, easy to use and maintain, within the budget, and long-lasting.**

■ This is the time of year when you'll be making your choices for striping and lining your baseball, softball, soccer and football fields.

Turf marking equipment includes low-pressure, hand-operated, compressed air sprayers; gas-operated piston pump sprayers; and high-pressure airless sprayers. Attachments include devices for forming soccer circles and arcs and extensions for freehand painting.

Sports Turf Managers Association professionals pass along these tips.

**Steve Wightman, Jack Murphy Stadium, San Diego—**

**1)** At the start of the season, measure accurately. Use a triangle to check right angles. Drive nails into the ground around the field perimeter, marking them with orange or yellow flagging. This way, you'll only need to measure once each season.

**2)** Locate flag points and stretch strings. A good, strong string is necessary. For parks departments and smaller schools, try to keep the lines at least four inches wide. To ensure accuracy, use an attachment to guide the sprayer along the stretched lines. A template can be attached to the sprayer to contain the spray within the desired pattern. Use a similar template for hash marks.

**3)** The field should be dry for spraying. Have a mixing area close by. Follow paint manufacturer's instructions, thickening the mix ratio as needed when cooler weather slows both drying and turf growth.

**4)** Make a 1/4-inch plywood template for numbers. To eliminate measuring steps and line up the numbers properly, position the bottom of the number template along the perimeter string.

**5)** Lower pre-season mower height to 1/16th inch below the normal cutting height. Mow again, on game day or before, to game cut. Alternate the grain in five-yard strips for football fields. Strive for uniformity.

**6)** Wightman spent 21 years with the Denver Parks System. Instead of painting, they used a special 8-inch-wide mower set to cut lines as a 1/8- to 1/4-inch height. Once lines are established, maintenance is

## Painting designs

■ David L. Westerman of Carbit Paint Co., Chicago, says the key difference between natural and artificial turf paints is that natural turf paints are semi-permanent, while the artificial paints are permanent. Because natural turf paints are applied to grass which grows out, they are designed to retain color through a couple of rains, but are destroyed when the grass is cut.

Old paint is removed with sweep brooms and high-pressure water.

On some artificial turf, multi-use fields, where markings must be changed frequently for different events, temporary dyes are applied which can be hosed off right after the games.

Painting can range from the basic lining/stripping to the fancy—for end zone and center-of-the-field decorations. Templates from plastic sheets are made for regularly-used designs.

Spray through dot-to-dot openings in the plastic to mark the outlines of the design. Then remove the template and fill in the dots.

To form the plastic template, project a slide image of the design on a 20-foot high wall. Line up the projector to the desired dimensions and make the cuts. For large decorations, multiple sections of plastic can be used and either fitted or hinged together for spraying.

## An alternative method

■ Safety-Line, from Oly-Ola Sales, Villa Park, Ill., is an alternative to athletic field lining/stripping.

It is a permanent marker constructed for player safety, made of soft, ribbed vinyl with a white, non-skid top. The marker is installed below the grass, at ground level, anchored by a 6-inch grooved fin that is further secured by a 9-inch steel anchor stake.

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relatively easy. The mowed lines can be chalked for special games.

**Ken Mrock, Chicago Bears—**

1) Use extremely low pressure when spraying paints. This method cuts drift, uses less paint, and allows the plants to grow before paint is applied again.

2) Lay out the normal football field and mark in white paint. To control turf wear, lay out a second pair of fields perpendicular to the first field and extending beyond it, using the 50-yard line as the divider between the two fields. The two perpendicular fields are marked with orange paint. This gives the team three fields or four separate quadrants for practice and spreads out the wear.

3) With limited budgets, mowing, chalking or glyphosate may replace painting.

**Bill Whirly, parks supervisor, Fort Collins, Colo.—**

1) Paint fields only in the spring and fall. To cut costs during the rest of the year, apply glyphosate with a sprayer. Mow



**Wightman: Strive for uniformity.**

the line areas to a height of 1-1/2 inches prior to painting or glyphosate applications. Since normal bluegrass height is

three inches, this leaves less leaf surface to contact.

2) Take care during glyphosate application to ensure the material does not affect turf beyond the desired line width. Whirly paints a 3- to 4-inch-wide line, but applies glyphosate to only one inch of turf to achieve the same result. Wightman suggests treating a 6-inch-wide strip of turf to create an 8-inch-wide line. The staying power of the glyphosate application will vary from one month to season-long, according to seasonal conditions and turf type.

3) For end-of-season playoffs, use semi-permanent paint. If fields still show post-season markings, those using them will play within the marked areas. When markings are not visible, the best sections of turf are chosen for play, reducing continual wear and compaction on the same spots.

—The authors are partners in *Trusty & Associates, consultants to the horticultural trade, headquartered in Council Bluffs, Iowa.*

## County extension and YOU

**In an attempt to do more with less, extension agents are opting to work more with landscape professionals and less with individual homeowners.**

by F. Brian Smith

■ As a landscape manager, you have many resources to choose from when you need help and assistance. You can turn to your local chemical rep, another landscape manager, equipment distributors and written literature like *LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT*.

But have you ever thought of your local extension service?

Most people think of the county agent as someone who knows a lot about pigs and cows, but very little about horticulture. However, many extension offices have an agent who is very knowledgeable about turf, ornamental plants and their care. This is especially true in the urban areas where the ornamental horticulture industry is strong.

Even if the county agent you deal with does not have a strong horticultural back-

ground, he can access the extension specialist and faculty at your state's land grant college horticulture department. This very fact alone makes the local extension office and your county agent a broker for some of the most important sources of information.

An added plus for using your county agent is when you're dealing with homeowners or managers: they are more likely to believe you when you explain that your information comes from the local extension service.

Many state extension services have a plant problem clinic. This is a service that will take samples from those landscape problems that have you stumped and run them through the diagnostic lab at the college or university. From my own experience as a county agent working with landscape professionals, quite often when we think we have solved a problem, the plant problem clinic will send us results showing it was caused by a problem we hadn't discovered.

Still, these clinics aren't completely able to solve all the problems. They are dependent on the sample you send and the information you provide with the sample. Many times, it has taken the clinic's diagnostic procedures, our site analysis and some imaginative detective work to find

the real cause of the problem, and not just the symptoms we first notice.

If you've never called your extension office and spoken with the county agent, now is a great time. Federal and state budget cuts have severely hampered many state extension services.

Most states are ending their long-standing policy of taking phone calls from homeowners or going to individual homes.

In an attempt to do more with less, they are opting to work with landscape professionals and let them deal with individual homeowners. What this means for you is the people who had been calling the local extension office will now call you.

This situation also means the county agent is not as distracted with homeowners and can work more closely with you.

Lastly, a good working relationship with your county agent can be invaluable when those problems arise that you can't solve on your own, or when the homeowner or manager won't accept your answers.

It makes the county agent's analysis easier when he is already familiar with you and your level of experience and work.

So start working with your county agent today. He might be able to help you solve that problem before it becomes a problem.

—The author is *Beaufort County Extension Agent for agriculture, cooperative extension service for Clemson University in South Carolina.*