

# Practical solutions for multi-use fields

by Dale Getz  
University of Notre Dame

■ At the University of Notre Dame, many of the athletic fields are used for practices and actual games, and we also have 18 acres of intramural fields used for softball, soccer, football, lacrosse and rugby.

Fields are heavily used from early spring through mid-October, with play normally completed by Dec. 1.

The majority of our fields are in flat, windy areas. The turf holds its color and we've experienced no winter desiccation. Generally, we have snow cover most of the winter.

**No. 1: aerate**—Aeration is the most important practice in the maintenance program. It loosens the soil, relieves compaction and promotes root growth.

We core aerate, then drag the cores until approximately 1/2 to 3/4 of the soil filters back into the holes. We then apply seed and a starter fertilizer. We drag the field again, pulling the seed and remaining core soil into the holes.

If the thatch portion of the core is small, it can be left on the field to decompose. We pick up excess thatch debris using the high setting of a sweeper. If you can't use a sweeper, and you're satisfied that the seed has been well covered, you can blow excess thatch material from the field with a power blower. Work from the center of the field, moving the thatch to the perimeter where it can be raked up and removed.

Budget and personnel availability usually limit our aerification to once a year, in the fall.

Sports fields need a light layer of thatch to provide an extra cushion of protection against the wear of play. We power rake intramural fields from the hash marks out, when necessary. Heavy play reduces thatch build-up between the hash marks. We also power rake the thick, bluegrass softball outfield to reduce susceptibility to disease.

When standard aeration and overseeding procedures can't be completed, applying seed for the players to "cleat in" can

provide adequate seed-to-soil contact.

All aeration, power raking and dethatching procedures are done prior to seeding. Though our optimum seeding span is from mid-August to the first of September, intramural fields are used every day during that period. Depending on the conditions, seed applied prior to Oct. 15 will still make fall growth here.

We've also had good results with dormant seeding. Seeds sprout in the spring, long before wet weather or lingering snow cover would allow field access for planting. Lighter early-spring field use allows the



Multiple striping patterns are an obvious necessity on multiple use fields.

young plants time to establish.

If funding and a break in the schedule allow it, we'll aerate and overseed practice and intramural fields in mid-spring, too.

**No. 2: seed**—We use perennial ryegrass for multi-use fields. Perennial ryegrass is up in 4 to 5 days, compared to 15 to 21 days for Kentucky bluegrass. With more than 5 percent perennial ryegrass in a blend, the aggressive rye will shade out the emerging bluegrass. Perennial rye takes abuse better, giving the turf toughness; bluegrass has better recuperative qualities, extending field life.

We use Scotts Perennial Ryegrass 100

Blend that contains 39 percent Accolade, 30 percent Pennant and 28 percent Ovation.

**No. 3: fertilize**—Dollar costs and personnel availability determine the fertilization program.

Generally, we apply a minimum of 3 to 4 pounds of nitrogen and 3 pounds of potash on the practice and intramural fields during the year. Annual soil testing has shown that we have adequate available phosphorus. Following overseeding, however, a starter fertilizer (8-15-24) supplies the needed boost of phosphorus.

Mid-July is the last major N application on fall sports fields to avoid growth spurts and overly lush turf. Excessive growth means clippings must be removed. Overly succulent turf seems to produce a slicker field. Our fertilization program resumes in mid-October. We plan to work more of the polymer-coated, slow-release nitrogens into the program, but even with these materials, there is a certain flush of growth that we

want to avoid during play periods.

**No. 4: weed control**—A good stand of turf is the best defense against weeds. When chemical controls are necessary, we choose products that work well with the least detrimental impact on the environment.

Pre-emergence applications are used only on fields that won't be overseeded, and only from the hash marks to the field perimeter. A combination fertilizer/pre-emergence material is used to save labor. Post-emergence controls for grassy weeds are kept on hand, but we haven't had to use them.

*continued on page 24*

Broadleaf weed control is most effective when used in the fall, as late as December first in northern Indiana. Easily-controlled weeds, such as dandelion and buckhorn, respond to lower application rates. On tough weeds, multiple application often can be avoided. Tender growth quickly absorbs the herbicide and actively growing roots distribute it more effectively.

On multi-purpose fields, broadleaf weeds are spot-treated as necessary in the spring. If weeds aren't treated prior to their prime blooming period, frequent mowing may keep them in check until fall treatment.

**No. 5: mow**—The practice and intramural fields are mowed primarily with a rotary mower because it's faster. If the blades are kept sharp, the rotary mower delivers a smooth, decent cut. There's no time—or need—to pick up clippings unless weather-interrupted mowing produces excessive amounts.

**No. 6: irrigate**—All Notre Dame fields have automatic irrigation systems. Even on low-budget facilities, irrigation systems pay for themselves with the flexibility they provide in maintenance procedures.

—Dale Getz is athletic facilities manager for the University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Ind. He's an active member of the national Sports Turf Managers Association (STMA) and is college/university director for the Midwest Chapter of the STMA.

## Market your advantages

■ Competing against the multi-million-dollar advertising budgets of larger companies can be near impossible. But small businesses have two marketing advantages, according to the National Association for the Self-Employed:

**1)** You can speak directly to your audience in their language. Your advertising can focus on local concerns and answer local needs. Larger companies must focus on mass appeal.

**2)** Because small businesses concentrate on a specific local or vertical group, they can better focus their advertising and public relations campaigns.

Unlike large corporations, small businesses can hand deliver flyers. Spot advertising in weekly shoppers is inexpensive and very local in scope.

Hosting a special event creates goodwill and promotes your sales. Large companies do special events for name recognition, which does not directly affect sales.

For more information, phone (800) 232-6273.

# The key to quality: 'a few good people' with varied tasks

■ A quality company must have quality employs, insists Barclay Bullock of Portland, Ore.

"If we pay a higher wage and compensation package, we'll attract people that are more dedicated to the customer," says Bullock. "The customer gets better service

had the work but we just lost efficiency."

The addition of a new construction manager to oversee the company's six crews, however, and an increasing management role for partner Jodi Nordstrom is launching the company to the next level, he believes.

"We're getting to the point where we do our own brick work, where we do our own water features. We don't do a lot of carpentry yet, but we're starting to do more of it. I think the employees enjoy doing different things," he explains.

"Actually, a landscaper is a plumber. He's an irrigation specialist. He's an electrician because we put in night lighting," continues Bullock. "He's a grader. He needs to know carpentry, stone work, and that's in addition to putting in plants. This is one of



Barclay Bullock building his Portland, Ore., company "one residential customer at a time."

and the landscape company succeeds. That's why we pay a higher wage than the industry average, and we provide benefits like medical, dental and vacation time."

Now, seven years after founding his landscape company, known as Barclay's Gardens Inc., Bullock is even more firmly convinced that solid employees drive exceptional customer service.

That's because Barclay's Gardens, with about 30 full-time employees, has emerged as a residential landscape leader in Portland, and should approach and, perhaps exceed, \$1.5 million in sales in 1994—70% build/install, 30% maintenance.

"Last year was a tough year," admits Barclay from behind the desk in the tiny frame office building (smaller than most house trailers). "I think growing pains finally hit us. We didn't have the people in place and trained for our growth. We

the most technically challenging industries in the United States.

Certainly, there's a market for quality landscaping in Portland, says Barclay. After all, the city's nickname is "The Rose City."

"People take a lot of pride in their landscapes here," says Barclay. "They will pay for quality work. If you can combine that with a reputation for service, and deliver what you say you can, you can write your own ticket."

Barclay began his landscape company on just that premise seven years ago. He also relied on the customer-driven, day-to-day service skills he practiced as a former ChemLawn technician and manager in Portland, Seattle and, finally, Long Beach. In fact, it was his six-month sojourn in Long Beach that chased him from lawn care and into his own enterprise back in Portland.