



Transition can be tricky

Tom Burns, turf manager of The Texas Rangers baseball team, has learned that Mother Nature can throw a knuckleball when it comes to overseeding

With nearly two decades of experience under his belt caring for sports turf in Texas, Arizona, Florida and Ohio, Texas Rangers turf manager Tom Burns knows that overseeding is rarely a cut-and-dried procedure. Mother Nature can always throw a knuckleball.

This spring in Arlington, TX, for example, spring storms combined with problematic shade to cloud his overseeding operations. Unusually warm temperatures caused the bermudagrass to break dormancy early, so Burns found himself overseeding later than ever — in mid-February. “You have to roll with the punches,” says Burns, who believes flexibility may be a turf manager’s greatest overseeding strategy.

Overseeding challenges and frustrations have contributed to his graying head of hair, Burns insists, but they won’t deter him from overseeding altogether. The perennial ryegrass provides wear tolerance to his dormant bermudagrass fields, enhances playability, and makes for better footing.

To keep himself up to speed on the latest overseeding techniques and developments, Burns moderates and participates in Sports Turf Managers Association overseeding roundtables. They’re lively, informative and opinionated sessions, he says. “You can have 100 people at a roundtable discussion and you’re going to have probably 95 different overseeding techniques,” says Burns, who has his opinions, too.

“The establishment phase of overseeding is not the difficult part, generally,” he says. “The hard part is getting the nice, smooth transition from the ryegrass to the bermuda. Some of the ryegrasses that are out there now are so heat tolerant, it’s hard to get rid of them. It’s hard to get your bermuda back because it’s got so much competition from the rye.”

Burns says he’ll likely go back to overseeding in the fall this year and face spring transition problems as ryegrass hangs on longer than he wants. “I think it’s probably easier to know you’re going into the start of the season with good turf. It’s just more of a security blanket.”

Athletic fields

On athletic fields, overseeding should be considered if the fields are used during the winter and/or early spring months. Coring, slicing prior to and top-dressing following overseeding are necessary steps. A heavy seeding rate (from 30 to 60 lbs./1,000 sq.ft.) is generally advised. But keep in mind that the higher the seeding rate, the faster the turf will die out in the spring due to seedling immaturity; but a lower seeding rate will slow transition back to the permanent grass in the spring. Avoid fertilizing until the new seedlings are established or the competition will crowd them out.

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