



How the Irish stay green

“Overseeding is more of a playability and safety issue than it is an aesthetic issue,” says Dale Getz, University of Notre Dame turfgrass manager.

“The aesthetics come into play more in how you prepare the field — mowing patterns, striping, that sort of thing.”

Getz has his crews aerify, partially drag and break up cores and fill aerification holes about 3/8-inch from the top. Crews then broadcast seed, break up the rest of the cores and topdress when possible, he says.

“That’s our preferred method, because it gets the seed to the depth we need it for good seed-to-soil contact, and we know we’re not losing it to birds, wind and desiccation.”

Constant overseeding

With athletic fields being used constantly for everything from football to lacrosse to soccer and even frisbee, it’s no small challenge to keep the turf vibrant. Seed is put down as much as every other week, in between official and recreational games.

“Whenever we open up the ground for any reason, whether it’s for aerification, spiking or verticutting, we’ll put seed down any way we can to get that seed-to-soil contact,” Getz says. “We go through a lot of seed.”

Getz broadcasts seed prior to practices and games to keep viable seed in the ground at all times to take advantage of favorable weather conditions for germination.

With 7- to 21-day germination rates for most varieties of Kentucky bluegrass, keeping plenty of seed in the ground increases the odds of success for the relatively ten-

der juvenile plants that may fall prey to desiccation in the first couple weeks.

Why rye?

Getz favors Kentucky bluegrass for his sports turf in South Bend, IN, but he finds that overseeding with pregerminated perennial ryegrass gives him an edge in the fall. “When the fields start to get worn out, say a soccer practice field, you can get the rye to sprout and in two days you’ve got grass coming up. And rye, unlike bluegrass, is a pretty strong and tough juvenile plant. So it can stand a little bit of wear and tear.”

That means if the Notre Dame football team has a three-week stint away from home, Getz can grow a stand of ryegrass by the time the next home game rolls around. “Whereas with bluegrass, pregerminated or not, even if you do get it up, it’s so tender when it’s young that it just doesn’t withstand the wear and tear.”

Getz exclusively overseeds with Kentucky bluegrass varieties each spring because it’s the turfgrass he wants for fall sports.

Part of the challenge for Getz is carefully studying NTEP trials to determine which seed varieties best fit his needs. “For football and other fall sports, I’m looking for a bluegrass that can maintain color late into the fall,” he says. “And it has got to have good toughness after it quits growing late in the fall.”

As Getz surveys the frozen ground only days before his mid-March baseball opener, he notes that spring requires a different approach when selecting bluegrass seed. “Here, I’m looking for a bluegrass that will give me quick greenup.”