



# Q&A

## Don't Let It Drag You Down

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### Have Questions?

SEND THEM TO DAVE MINNER AT IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY, 106 HORTICULTURE HALL, AMES, IA 50011, OR E-MAIL: DMINNER@IASTATE.EDU. OR, SEND THEM TO GRADY MILLER AT UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA, P.O. BOX 110670, GAINESVILLE, FL 32611, OR E-MAIL: GMILLER@MAIL.IFAS.UFL.EDU.

**I** am an Athletic Director in Okinawa, Japan, and I have questions about a couple of issues concerning softball field maintenance.

- 1) Will a Gator work as well as a Bunker Rake with regards to softball field dragging?
- 2) If I had a choice between buying a Gator and a Bunker Rake, which would you choose?
- 3) Should an infield be turned over and scarred up regularly, to ensure it does not become too compact?

Will Marjenhoff, Athletic Director Okinawa, Japan

**H**ere are some of my thoughts, along with those of our Sports Field Manager, Mike Andresen, at Iowa State University, and Grady Miller, University of Florida.

The Gator and Bunker Rake that you mentioned are both made by John Deere and they have been widely used in the sports turf, golf, and construction industries. Other companies that provide a wide range of utility and field grooming equipment that may fit your needs include: Bannerman ([www.sportsturfmagic.com](http://www.sportsturfmagic.com)), Kromer ([www.kromer-afm.com](http://www.kromer-afm.com)), Textron ([www.ttcsp.textron.com](http://www.ttcsp.textron.com)), Toro ([www.toro.com](http://www.toro.com)), and others. Since you specifically mentioned the Gator and Bunker Rake, I'll use them as examples.

This question basically comes down to what are your most important needs. The Gator is primarily a utility vehicle with a cargo bed that can be used to transport people and

materials. All field grooming attachments must be pulled behind the Gator. The Gator can be used to pull home-made or manufactured drags and scarifiers. Many parks departments use this as their primary equipment for grooming dirt infields. The major drawback to using any utility vehicle for this purpose is the wide turning radius and inability to maneuver the drag in tight areas. Since it does not have a center mounted scarifier that supplies down pressure it does not offer the flexibility of deep scarifying and dragging at the same time, if desired. Regardless, the Gator with various drag attachments has been effectively used to manage baseball/softball skin areas. The obvious advantage in purchasing a utility vehicle to drag the fields is that you then have a utility vehicle to do many hauling and transportation tasks. If hauling is more important than simplicity and effectiveness in dirt grooming then the Gator is for you.

If your utility vehicle demands are already met, then you may want to consider purchasing a dedicated field grooming machine like the Bunker Rake. Be sure to get the field grooming version of John Deere's Bunker Rake. The Field Rake is specifically for athletic fields—it has a different type of push blade on the front and has the belly-mounted, heavy-duty scarifier for cutting the skin on the infield.

Mike Andresen manages soccer, football, and softball/baseball fields at Iowa State University. He has both

the Gator and Field Rake from John Deere. Here was his response when I put your question to him. "Without a doubt, I buy the Bunker Rake with the Field Groomer attachment. The Gator has the advantage of hauling material, but is far inferior for dragging (turning radius the most obvious). The Gator has no scarifier, so you will need to build or buy a sturdy nail drag to work the surface. The Field Rake has a special air cleaner for working in dirt, has a negative turning radius for sharp turns and, most important of all, comes with a scarifier. If budget is a concern, then buy the Bunker Rake and use wheel barrows for hauling dirt."

In response to your question on fighting compaction and working the dirt, Mike recommends, "Generally, we dig up or deep scarify our infield immediately prior to a rainfall. We roll frequently to get the firmness we desire, so it is important to deeply scarify to help avoid a 'pan-layer.' This is also the time we can move soil around to fill in low spots and remove high spots. The rainfall helps firm the soil again, yet we have the drainage quality afforded us by the deep scarifying. If sufficient rainfall doesn't occur, we hose water and roll."

Grady Miller, from the University of Florida, makes another important point. He suggests that you also consider the distance you are required to haul items like bases, hoses, rakes, and other maintenance items before making your decision.



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