

Preparing for the fall playing season

As Murray Cook points out on the page opposite, August brings the start of football practice, as well as many other sports, across the country. This presents opportunities for every turf manager, from the seasoned vets to the novices determined to improve their fields this year.

To help those readers who fall into the latter category, I turned to an expert for some advice. Here's what STMA Board member Mike Andresen, CSFM, athletic turf manager for the Iowa State Cyclones, has to offer:

"Everyone needs to have a 'seeding plan.' If you can only buy 10 pounds of seed, figure out the best plan for that 10 pounds. We spread seed in the middle of our practice fields and along the sidelines beginning with the first week of practice and continue throughout the fall growing season. We use pre-germinated seed regularly to help us work within shortened germination windows," says Mike.

"We use divot mix on our playing field to aid healing. Although every turf manager's situation is different, there are going to be windows of opportunity for all so you absolutely have to be prepared to take advantage of them. If you wait to act until that window is upon you, you have lost a great deal of efficiency and your results will be average."

Another key to success is to water effectively. "Understand evapo-transpiration and how the fall climate changes in your area," Mike says. "Excessively wet soils compound traffic effects and bring on compaction. The fall playing season is a difficult time to tackle soils-related issues, so avoid bringing one upon yourself. Know your soils, know your infiltration rates, and water only as needed."

All turf managers can use advice occasionally, but Mike cautions against having rabbit ears. "Listening to every coach or player reaction to your playing surface is unhealthy. You know when your surface is 'right' and if you don't, you should turn to a coach or player who can give you a fair appraisal," he says.

"Talk to some wise field managers and you can easily sense the affection they have for their fields. They know them inside and out, how they play, how they feel, how the weather affects them, and even how they smell. Develop that relationship with your playing field and you'll learn to listen to the field and not to the players, coaches or fans!

"I think many times we set ourselves up to react rather than to act," Mike says. "Too many of us have to spend our time driving buses, coaching teams, raising kids, and we neglect to take the time to plan. We think mowing the field is more productive than visualizing and roughly planning out the week. Reacting during the heat of battle is not conducive to making the very best long-term choices. If you can think through your challenges before they appear, you will be prepared if one of them does happen."



Comments always welcome.

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