By Dr. Grady Miller, Environmental Horticulture Dept., University of Florida

No such thing as a bad question

With the approach of spring I am often reminded of the childhood pranks we pulled on each other for April Fools Day. Springtime ushers in other returning traditions, including a new growing season and high school science projects. Both of these events often increase my bank of questions that have me asking "are you kidding?" I thought I might share a few recent questions that made me chuckle. But before I share some of these questions with you, I don't want you to think that any question is a bad question. Yearning for knowledge or getting some advice is a good thing. I will provide my short responses.

Grady Miller

Why is grass green?

This is actually a question that is more commonly sent from younger aspiring turf managers. Like a lot of other "simple" questions, this one could be answered on so many levels one could easily produce a Master's thesis with their response. I usually mention that plants are rich in chlorophyll, which is a green pigment that absorbs blue and red spectrum of light from sunlight. Light from the green spectrum is largely reflected. Chlorophyll absorbs so strongly that it masks other colors that may be present. When chlorophyll is damaged other colors may become more visible.

Are there regulations against having a hedge down the sidelines of a football field?

The sidelines are only 11 feet deep in our HS stadium but I like the look of hedges that I see on weekend football games. Some questions seem to answer themselves. But then again, the answer may be wrong. It is often not the question that I have to address as much as it is the extra information offered with the question. Without even looking up the regulation, my response has to be "do not plant the hedge." The hedge would have to be planted away from the wall, and then they will likely grow with time to be several feet wide. Then the hedge becomes a nuisance and a potential safety hazard when there are only six or seven feet between the hedge and sideline. There is also the consideration of the rootzone for the hedge, shade implications, and maintenance issues.

Is there a problem with mixing fertilizer, seed, insecticide and using a hydroseeder to distribute?

Yes. We have become a society that likes convenience and are all for saving money and time. Some things we just should not try to combine. While it may be ok to spread fertilizer with seed, some combinations could potentially result in salt problems with seed. Some fertilizers may also deactivate a pesticide, especially fluid products. Pesticide labels may contain more specifics. There are application rate questions that need answering. It would be difficult to calibrate the delivery system for these combinations and ensure they were all put out at an appropriate rate or concentration.

A hydroseeder is also not the most adjustable delivery method to dial in rates or direct the materials in the desired application area.

Will my turf grow back after being covered with plywood for a month?

My first response to this question was, "Why do you want to cover your turf for a month?" The response was "to protect it." I had to chuckle on the phone. I have not done the studies, but I suspect that Bermudagrass might grow back after being covered for a month. It would likely take a very long time and come back patchy, but would probably come back. In essence this manager was protecting the soil structure and preventing displacement (rutting) rather than protecting the turfgrass. There is no doubt that for short term (days not weeks) plywood can preserve a field and its turf. But for longer periods of time, perforated materials that allow air exchange and water infiltration would be better than plywood. But even modern mat material will have its limitations.

I am researching about turfgrass for baseball and soccer. But I don't have enough info about turf. I'd like to know what type of turfgrasses you use for each field, how to build the field, and how to maintain the turf.

Unfortunately these broad-based questions are too common. There is still a lot of education needed in this industry, especially for volunteers who manage low-budget fields, or for those for whom field maintenance is an "added responsibility" to their jobs. The most frequently asked questions I get deal with the basics: mowing, fertilizing, irrigation, topdressing, and pest control. To get started, I recommend people purchase a good turfgrass text. For athletic field managers, it is tough to beat *Sports Fields* by Puhalla, Krans, and Goatley. In addition, information relating to athletic field maintenance is readily available from extension service publications and state extension personnel.

In summary, never be afraid to ask questions. We all start learning somewhere and we all run into difficulties. The Rhodes scholar Christopher Morley once said, "There are three ingredients to the good life: learning, earning, and yearning." Thanks for the questions. **ST**

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