

Advice on mowing stripes and patterns

SPORTSTURF asked several prominent turf managers to answer questions on how they stripe their fields. Here are some of the responses:

Trevor Vance, Kansas City Royals

ST: In your opinion, what are the most important things to know about mowing designs on baseball fields?

Vance: The field is the backdrop of the game. You want it to look crisp, sharp, and professional. Don't take away from the game; the fans come to see the players, and after they say, "Wow!" when they first see the field, you don't want them talking about it any more. You want your field to be beautiful but not "loud."

Get comfortable with your mower first. Start simple; cutting a straight line isn't as easy as it looks. Maybe start by cutting 1/2 circles; then you can't tell if your lines are not straight. Don't repeatedly go over a line trying to get it straight though.

ST: How do you mow a straight line?

Vance: Find a point ahead and stay focused on it, then go for it. It's not easy, as I said. Hopefully your foul lines are straight, so start there, cutting along the line first, then try and follow that straightness. If you mess up, you can fix it the next day.

ST: What equipment do you use to stripe?

Vance: We use a triplex 3-reel 2653 mower in the outfield and sometimes in the infield. We also use a walk-behind 26-inch greens mower, which stripes wider so you make fewer passes.

We vary our cuts, using a different pattern every homestand. What pattern is chosen depends on weather, time of year, and length of the homestand. A shorter one we might just have a center cut; longer, we crosscut different direction every day so we don't put a grain into the turf.

ST: Do you have to make adjustments in your maintenance schedule to mow designs? Time of day, height of cut, etc.?

Vance: In the heat of summer we cut lots of 1/2 circles so we don't have to be so exact.

Barney Lopas, Anaheim Angels

In his 9th year in Anaheim, Barney Lopas keeps it simple. "We cut a line from home plate directly to where each of our players stands, and we keep it that way throughout the entire homestand," he says of his infield mowing pattern.

"When the team's gone, we mow in different directions, but 5 or 6 days before they are back, we starting burning in the old pattern," Lopas says.

Lopas doesn't always keep it simple though. His post-9/11 American flag was a masterpiece, as was the tribute "26" cut into the outfield to honor long-time Angels owner Gene Autry after he passed away. The number refers to Autry's status as the "26th man" on the roster, says Lopas.

For three seasons Lopas and crew mowed the outfield with walk-behinds but now have some nine-blade triplex mowers from Jacobsen for the outfield, as well both Jake and Toro walk-behind models. He uses them all to create his stripes.

Lopas says if you're just starting to cut some lines into your field, use string lines to centerfield or a foul line, then mow three lines, mow them back again, before moving on to three more lines, and so on. "Pick a point on the fence and head straight for it. Once your lines are mowed in, it's a piece of cake from there," Lopas says. "Even I could do it!"



Collin Castille, Houston Astros

ST: In your opinion, what are the most important things to know about mowing designs on baseball fields?

Castille: Knowing what your grass is capable of doing is the most important. What will the grass look like when you put a particular pattern in? How many times do you have to mow in order to get

the grass looking the way you want it (or how long does it take to get an old pattern out).

ST: What equipment do you use to stripe?

Castille: We use mowers with rollers on them. Our walk behind, which we use for the infield, is a reel mower with a small roller in the front and a large drum in the back of the cutting unit. Our outfield unit has three reels on it, also has rollers in front and in back of the cutting unit. These rollers do very good jobs and produce what we are looking for.

ST: Do you have to make adjustments in your maintenance schedule to mow designs?

Castille: No, we are fortunate that we do not have to make any adjustments to our program in order to create a pattern on our field. Our grass stripes up nicely. The only drawback to our field is that we have to cut our grass pretty low. In order for us to get a pattern to look very good we have to mow it at least five times in order to make it look good. If we ever wanted to do something with high detail we would probably have to mow it more than five times.

ST: Any other advice for those who want to mow patterns on baseball fields?

Castille: Keep your patterns simple and clean. Don't have more than one pattern in at a time. **ST**