

Bossard values use of SOIL CONDITIONERS

Roger Bossard, head groundskeeper for the Chicago White Sox, learned first hand the importance of a well-maintained baseball field from his father and grandfather.

Over the years questions have risen about the advantages of soil conditioners for sports field construction and maintenance. Experts in the profession know first hand the importance of using them. Roger Bossard, head groundskeeper for the Chicago White Sox says, "There are two main factors in the success of maintaining any sports field. First the field must be constructed properly. Making the right decisions on building tools, turf, drainage systems, etc is key. Second, that after construction the field is properly cared for and maintained. Soil conditioners are a major part of both construction and maintenance."

Soil conditioners made from calcined montmorillonite clay are used to manage moisture, reduce compaction, and increase drainage on

your sports field. They can be used during construction on the turf areas of your field to improve rootzone growth and also on the skinned areas of your baseball or softball field to enhance footing.

This technology was first introduced for use on major league baseball fields in the 1960s.

Then head groundskeeper for the White Sox, Gene Bossard, used this emerging technology to give his team the home advantage. Gene perfected the use of soil conditioners on his field to maintain its health and beauty and also learned how they could improve footing on the infield for the team.

Gene Bossard regularly incorporated soil conditioners into the maintenance of his field and has been heralded as a pioneer in using this technology. Roger, Gene's son, learned from

his father about the importance of using soil conditioners. As an expert in his field, Bossard teaches others about field maintenance and shares his love for the job with up and coming groundskeepers.

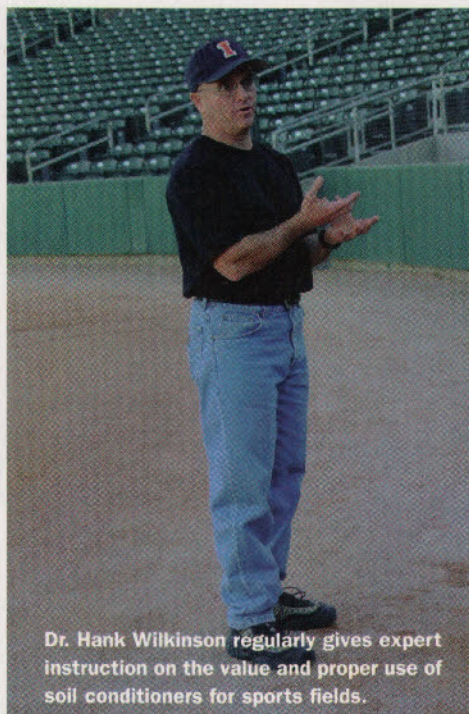
Understanding the concept of how a soil conditioner works and its use is not rocket science. Calcined montmorillonite clays that make up the best soil conditioners are processed to a certain hardness or ceramic-like material. When incorporated into the soil the conditioner creates spaces so the roots grow deeper thus toughening up your grass. As a footing for the skinned areas of your ball field, soil conditioners absorb excess water because of their capacity to suck up moisture; they also help with traction as an athlete is running.

Not just for MLB

Bossard says, "When we start a project, our approach revolves around three considerations. These concepts don't just work at the Major League level. If anything, they're even more important to consider on municipal and academic projects."

- Never forget the purpose of the field—athletics. The decisions you make will affect its ability to be available on game day. Games that have to be rescheduled or cancelled cost money. Inadequate turf and infields can also cause poor playing conditions, which can lead to injury.

- Common sense goes a long way in designing a field. Keep it simple. Once it's built, someone is going to have to take care of it. Your success depends on the decisions you make. In Seattle, the team spent 3 years finding a grass that would proliferate in the



Dr. Hank Wilkinson regularly gives expert instruction on the value and proper use of soil conditioners for sports fields.

Pacific Northwest climate, under a retractable dome, none-the-less.

- The original design concept must not only keep the construction budget in mind, but the maintenance budget as well. Even the best designs will suffer if you can't afford to take care of them.

Professor Henry Wilkinson, an expert in designing, building and maintaining natural grass sports fields, has completed years of research proving the benefits of soil conditioners. "If you want to create the perfect medium for playing ball, you have to do your homework," says Wilkinson. "Understanding the type of soil you have, sand or clay based, will help determine how a soil conditioner can optimize the conditioning and moisture management effects on your field."

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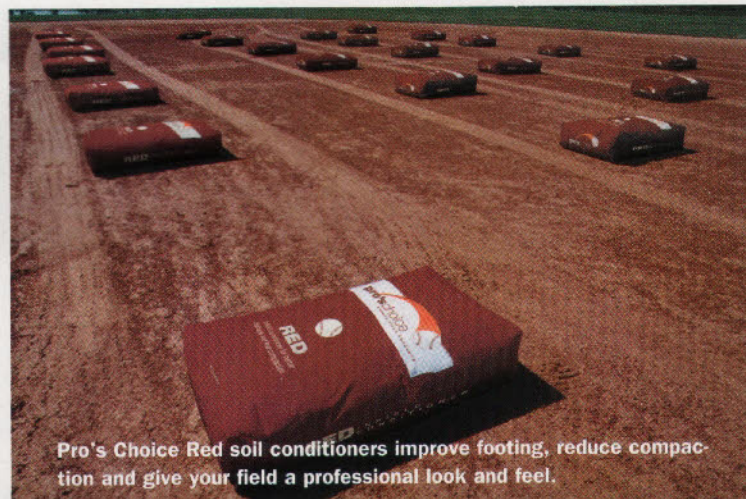
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durable and don't break down into dust. Find a granular size distribution that best meets your needs and your budget. For your turf areas, a hard, irregular-shaped soil conditioner will give you the best performance.

"For the infield, I recommend choosing one with the reddest color and the least dust," says Bossard.

When it comes to maintaining the field there are a few things to consider. "In baseball it's important to remember," says Bossard, "70% of the action takes place on the infield, so that's where your resources should be focused. Don't forget the turf though, proper maintenance will prevent more expensive repairs down the road."

- Every groundskeeper should know his or her athletes' wants and needs. In the Major Leagues, that means making sure that the franchise players have conditions that optimize their talents. At other levels you need to ensure the field is safe and ready when needed.
- You should choose the best base clay and soil conditioner that fits your needs. Of all the soil structures out there, only about 10% are even suitable for a baseball field. You have to find what's best for your situation.



Pro's Choice Red soil conditioners improve footing, reduce compaction and give your field a professional look and feel.

- Make sure your drainage options meet your needs. The number and placement of your watering heads is critical to good irrigation. Your clay should be moist to a depth of 1/2-3/4" at game time. Of course, weather factors like wind and humidity will play a role in the amount of water needed.

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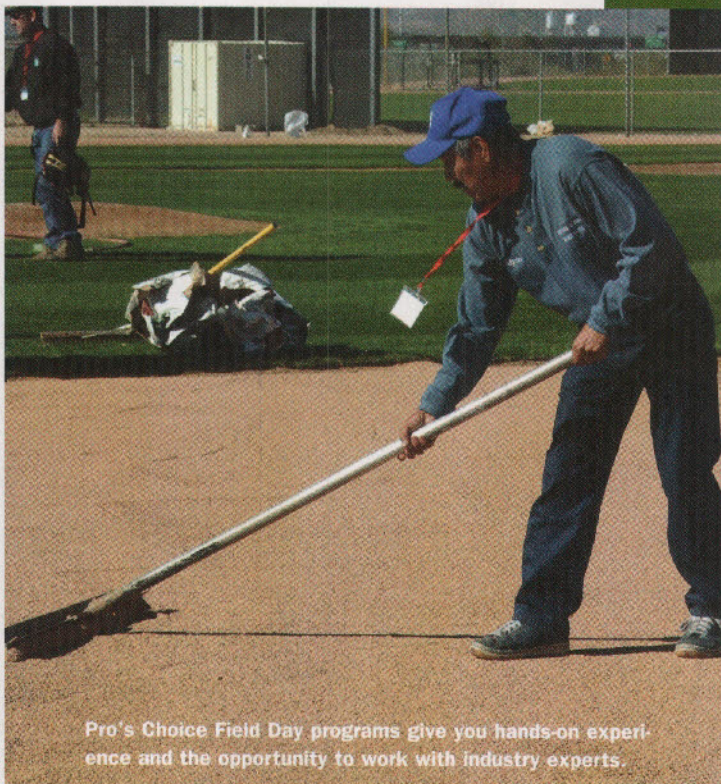
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- Find a knowledgeable/skilled groundskeeper for guidance. There are many good resources and a pool of knowledge out there to help you. The best resources are often other groundskeepers. "The best way for a new groundskeeper to learn about field maintenance is to actually do it. In this business, hands-on experience is the best way to learn," says Bossard.

The skinned areas of the field are most important to the player. "If there is a bad hop you just cringe and you never want to see it. It happens though," says Bossard. "The biggest pressure moments are when you are in the playoffs. God forbid you have two outs, you're winning by a run and someone hits a ground ball and it takes a bad hop and you lose the World Series. Trust me when I tell you that every groundskeeper is concerned about how the field plays. Soil conditioners make the difference.

"As the person responsible for my team's safety and comfort on the field, I am very conscience and selective about the products I use," says Bossard. "Every groundskeeper, no matter at what level of play, should be just as aware of their field. Going to school and learning from a book is a plus but the

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most important part is going out on the field and learning it hands-on."

Pro's Choice sports field products sponsors local field day programs that provide you hands-on experience to learn about proper field construction and maintenance of baseball and softball fields. Pro's Choice Field Days brings expert knowledge to the local level. You'll have professional groundskeepers at your disposal to ask questions that pertain directly to your field and your problems. This one-day program is an excellent opportunity to network with groundskeepers in your immediate area and work with knowledgeable people. ■

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