

Environmental turf craft

By Kevin Trotta

At the intersection of the natural world and the human world lies the athletic field. It is the integration of nature's raw materials (grass) and man's propensities to play and to shape his surroundings. As a blending of man and environment it serves as a natural-cultural resource.

It provides an opportunity for people to be outside, where our species evolved, naturally linked to the dynamic green and blue complexity around us.

In this time of heightened environmental awareness, the challenge for those of us who manage these fields is to find cleaner, more sustainable, "greener" means of doing so. Environmental Turf Craft represents an approach to this challenge as it seeks to reconcile turf management and environmental stewardship.

A craft is a marriage of art and science. The requisite goal of the sports turf manager here in the eco-conscious 21st century, is to

become a master craftsman, responsibly and expertly practicing this kind of art informed by science.

Environmental Turf Craft is a convenient name for a hybrid system that incorporates the most effective and sustainable aspects of Integrated Pest Management, organic systems, conventional management, and environmental Best Management Practices. As in modern integrative medicine: if it works, use it. The objective is balance: to maximize the well-known benefits of turfgrass while minimizing negative impacts.

Big picture proactivity

This proactive mindset provides the perspective to better evaluate the "big picture" ramifications of our operations. We can review our management decisions in ways that transcend purely agronomic criteria. Some typical turf craft considerations might include:

- Is our 30-year-old tractor negating the turf's air quality benefits?

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- Are unreasonably low cutting heights sustainable?
- Can we use some natural organic fertilizers in our programs, a practical answer to a question of waste?
- Is our equipment tuned for peak performance?
- Does continuing education allow us to accurately identify turf problems and their causes?
- Shouldn't pesticides be comparatively scrutinized before selection?
- Aren't there special considerations in the sand-based rootzones of some sports fields?
- How and where is our mowing equipment washed?
- Is fertility mismanagement canceling out the water purifying benefits of turf?
- Are we addressing a pest issue with chemical intervention when a cultural modification will do?
- Has an irrigation audit enabled the most efficient use of a natural resource?
- Are the attitudes and actions of our industry visible and recognizable as those of environmental stewards?

Environmental Turf Craft is a balanced approach that relies on science to steer the course. It's more than an amalgam of tools and techniques. When our daily management decisions are guided by the underlying principles of environmental responsibility, our strategies

and procedures are subtly and positively influenced. We abandon the clumsy, product based, heavy-handed practices left over from turf management's infancy in the last century. We become aware of our roles as navigators and pilots within the environmental movement. We take our place as leaders in this new kind of pragmatic environmentalism where social and economic as well as ecological objectives are balanced.

We become active caregivers in the process of earth's healing: as toxic, abandoned mining sites become oxygen generating golf courses; as landfills are sealed and reborn as health promoting athletic fields; as people get out of their homes and offices and, seeking recreation and life sustaining fresh air, join us on our turf.

It's unfortunate that some misguided critics of turfgrass see us as an environmental problem when obviously, we're part of the solution.

What could be greener than grass?

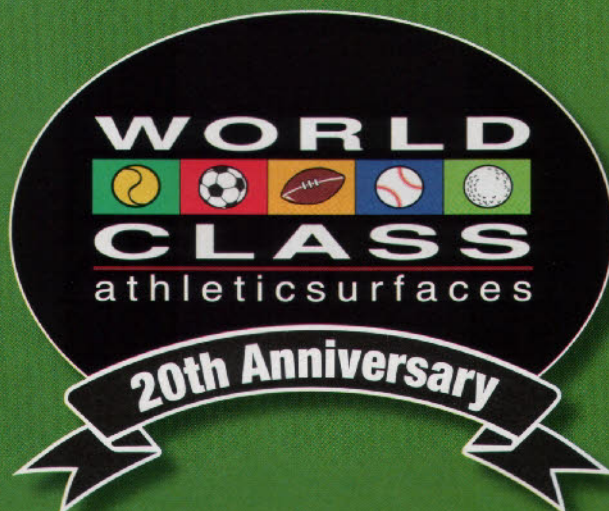
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Kevin Trotta is the New York Team Captain of the Global Sports Alliance, an official partner of the United Nations Environment Program, and is head groundskeeper of the North Rockland School District, Garnerville, NY.

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