



Benefits of verticutting

By Darian Daily

Verticutting has many important benefits to produce healthy sports turf.

We all know the cultural practices such as aerification and topdressing are important for healthy sports turf. But verticutting or vertical mowing is the least-used practice. Verticutting has many important benefits to produce healthy sports turf, including thatch removal, lateral growth promotion, seed bed preparation, and early spring green up.

Thatch removal

Whether you maintain warm season or cool season turf, thatch control is important. Some thatch is good for the field system. The proper

amount of thatch will assist in the breaking down of chemical (fertilizers) because of the higher likelihood of having good microbial activity. Proper thatch will allow for better seed bed for new seedlings and gives good footing. Excessive thatch can lead to a poor draining field, a higher susceptibility to diseases, and unstable footing.

Proper verticutting loosens the old thatch and brings it to the top. Once the old thatch is removed, the turf can take in more water and take in more air promoting healthier turf. Another positive of removing excessive thatch is that your turf will dry quicker because the air and sun get down to the soil.

On the playability side, having too much thatch, the field will feel soft and "slow." A field with proper thatch will feel firm and "fast."

Promotes lateral growth

For sports turf managers maintaining warm season grasses, verticutting is as important as aerification. With proper fertilization, verticutting warm season grasses will stimulate the cut stolons to generate new growth from the cut area and this forms a much thicker and denser turf. After a light topdressing, the field will become nice and "tight" and ready for play.

The same is true, but to a lesser degree, for

some types of cool season grasses such as bluegrass. In bluegrasses there is some lateral growth, but not as much as bermudagrass. With the help of verticutting the same cutting of the "runners" will simulate growth and help form a better root mass and help to fill in thin spots.

Seed bed preparation

Verticutting is a great tool to enhance your overseeding regiment. The most important aspect of getting good seed germination is to have good seed-to-soil contact. In most cases, we are trying to seed into established turf such as over seeding into bermudagrass. With the use of verticutting, you will open up the turf to allow the seed to get in touch with the soil and increase the chance of a successful germination.

When you are trying to seed into thin areas, a light verticutting will loosen the soil to allow for good seed-to-soil contact. The sports turf manager needs to be careful when verticutting thin areas. You must remember that the turf is already weak and any aggressive verticutting could set you back further.

Early spring green-up

From my personal observations, verticutting in early spring (March in the Cincinnati area) will help with green up of cool season grasses.

When you verticut, you remove the old, dead grass that has been laying there over the winter. Verticutting breaks up the winter derogation and opens the soil up to the warm sun that promotes earlier growth.

Once the soil is opened up to that warmth, the grass starts to grow and thicken up. I have seen areas that we verticut green up and start to grow 4 weeks earlier than non-verticut areas.

Timing is very important. You have to be careful not to try this too early in the year. You have to wait until the heavy frost period is over. If you verticut too early and get a couple weeks of hard and cold weather, your plants could be in trouble and take longer to recover since you have removed their protection.

Talk with other sport turf managers around your area and ask their thoughts and techniques about verticutting. They can assist you with finding the proper timing and equipment to do the job.

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