

Better seeding and sodding results

Editor's note: We asked two seed companies and two sod farming companies to share their thoughts on how to get the best results when using their products. Our thanks to Christiaan Arends, Barenbrug USA; John Marman, West Coast Turf; Marty Thiel, Graff's Turf Farms; and Russ Nicholson, Pennington Seed.

Successful overseeding

Annual ryegrass (left) and new dwarf varieties (right). Photo courtesy of Barenbrug USA.

THERE ARE A NUMBER of different methods to overseed your sports field. Whether you choose to use a seeder or simply hand spreading over bare spots, the overseeding practice is critical to your success. And while overseeding has traditionally been an off-season occurrence, newer varieties make overseeding during the season a great way to maintain the playability and aesthetics of your field throughout the year.

Overseeding during the season can be a tremendous challenge. With constant field use and less than optimum growing conditions, germination and establishment are often inhibited. So, very often, overseeding during the season is abandoned. But this is a potentially wasted opportunity. With the development of very quick germinating turf-type annual ryegrasses varieties you can be mowing within a few days and have your field looking good for the next event.

During the season you do have one advantage when seeding—you have built in slit-seeders. If you seed just before a game the players are able to walk the seed into the soil. This places the seed exactly where you want it, in good contact with the topsoil. There are a number of sports turf mangers that use this method and are able to mow within a week of seeding, including Tony Leonard of the Philadelphia Eagles. He has seen tremendous results using this method and is able to improve the aesthetics and playability of his field within a week.

A key to the “in-season” overseeding method is selecting the correct varieties that germinate very quickly and at colder temperatures. Recently true turf-type annual ryegrasses have been introduced to the sports turf market. They have very high turf quality and good wear tolerance. A major advantage of the turf-type annu-

al ryegrasses are that they germinate quicker than perennial ryegrasses (yes, it is possible) and they germinate at lower temperatures. So for overseeding in early spring or late fall, you will see faster results using annual ryegrass.

While the annuals offer several short-term advantages, they are not intended as a long-term solution. As is their nature, annual ryegrasses will disappear after a few months, but even a short term grass on the field is better than the alternative. This method combined with your current off-season practices will provide a year round playing surface that will not only look good, but be safe.

Fast-germinating Kentucky bluegrasses

It is well known that traditional Kentucky bluegrass varieties have very slow germination rates. Varieties such as Midnight look beautiful, but are slow to establish and often outcompeted by other species in the mix. Because of the competition you may never get to appreciate their aesthetics or the inherent benefit of the bluegrass species, extreme wear tolerance. Kentucky bluegrass is seeded in hopes that the few plants that do take hold will spread, but often the plants are stressed to the point where this multiplication will not take place.

Recently a tremendous amount of research has been undertaken to increase the germination and establishment rate of Kentucky bluegrass. Currently released varieties can germinate in as little as 7 days, cutting the traditional time frame of 21 days significantly. In addition these varieties have been screened for wear tolerance making them an even better choice for sports turf applications. There has also been significant work done in the area of germination at lower temperatures. **-Christiaan Arends**