



Better sodding results

Photo courtesy of West Coast Turf

Let's assume all construction irrigation and drainage is done properly.

Get several soil samples for a sieve analysis, sodium and nutrient testing. Find out what type of soil you have so it can determine what sod farms you should be talking to. Example: If you have a sandy field, look into finding a sod farm that grows your product of interest on a sandy profile. If you have high sodium you may consider planting paspalum sod. A soil sample is also very useful to determine the type of amendments and the rate of application of those amendments. Amendments are used most effectively when applied before tilling the soil or if you are importing soil they can also be blended in at the plant which is slightly more costly.

Visit your preferred sod farm and take a look at the material you will be receiving. Get an early look and make sure the soil will integrate well with your project. Some sod growers have several farms and may have the same variety of sod on different soils. They may grow on USGA sand or have the ability to wash the sod all to alleviate the possibility of having an interface problem created when the existing soil and the sod soil have different characteristics.

Make sure you select the proper turf variety, recognizing some varieties/cultivars may be better suited for specific field activities than others. Also, visit the farm a day or two before the delivery date to make sure you are getting what you requested and to get a last look at the sod condition.

Call your sod company and schedule an appointment with a sales representative. Go over ingress and egress. Let them know if you have neighbors harboring shotguns who are tired

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of semi-truck drivers asleep with the diesel engine running the air conditioner at 5 am on a 90 degree morning (it has happened!).

Consider laser grading the field after tilling. Get out to some of your STMA chapter-organized field days and get a chance to look at a laser leveling operation in process. You will be impressed with how close the grade is to perfection when it is complete. This will help drain surface areas if adequate drainage is/was not installed.

Close the mainline valve the night before sodding. This should be standard practice the day before sodding (I can tell you from experience after showing up to a lake with 100,000 square feet of sod ready to go right in the middle of it). Simply turning off the irrigation controller doesn't cut it if a valve breaks in the wrong place.

Consider spending a few extra dollars and request that the sod be sprayed with a plant growth regulator (PGR) a week before shipping. This is effective in two ways. First, slowing down the respiration of the plant will permit less heating in the rolls. This will provide longer transport time particularly useful for sod shipped long distances. The second benefit is the fact that a PGR will generate more growth laterally closing seams while also enhancing rooting into the rootzone while effectively slowing top growth. This will act as a catalyst to generate more rooting before having to mow the turf too soon due to excessive top growth. This works especially well with cool season big roll sod in a warm season climate.

Make sure the irrigator handling the initial watering has both knowledge and control of the irrigation field controller. The irrigation tech must also continually hand water the sod as it goes down with a hose attached to a quick coupler or any other source, particularly on hot days. This specific hand watering will ensure that all sand and soil lying on top of the sod is properly washed off and not heating up and burning the turf below. Hand watering will also increase the effectiveness of finding hot spots that may need more water initially while keeping the water at only the necessary level on other areas where the irrigation system will adequately and uniformly distribute water.

Hopefully you have had an irrigation audit to increase irrigation efficiency; however, we do install sod on windy days and efficiency goes out the window with a slight breeze.

Fertility. We could go on and on about fertility, but there are sev-

eral important points to note. If you have a sand-based field you may lose a lot of nitrogen if applying too much before or even after sodding. You may or may not choose to use a pre-plant fertilizer depending on your soil profile. You should apply water soluble fertility through a fertigation system if you have one or use a spray rig after the sodding is complete and tacked down with roots. If you have questions regarding fertility, talk with your sod farm rep or your fertilizer rep about a grow-in and maintenance fertility program.

And finally—rolling. For many years I have listened to architects, university turfgrass professors, field managers, landscape contractors, sod farm salesmen on the subject of rolling. Here are my thoughts:

If you have a nice firm grade you will only have to roll if your sod installer uses equipment that leaves tracks. If you use turf tires or even a track layer you may be home free without having to roll. If you are sodding with thick-cut material due to a fast approaching event you will need to roll the sod because thick-cut sod will have air pockets that need to be compressed. If you are using a tractor without a side shifter and you are rolling over part of the sod, you may need to use a sod roller to compact all of the seams evenly.

Many high profile athletic facilities will use 1.5 ton rollers but they have different goals and a larger budget than say, a high school field. Professional field managers in some cases have so many other events they have the ability to re-sod annually. In that scenario they will often rip the field and till the soil, which will relieve compaction allowing for some rolling to be done once the field is installed.

A high school field will not have that luxury and each time the field is rolled you increase the rate of compaction. In some cases more harm than good is done when rolling a field with a heavy roller or an inexperienced operator. If you *must* roll, make sure the field has the proper moisture level and be sure to flag heads and valve boxes. Start firm and apply water if necessary.

If you consider all of these steps to sodding you should be in good shape. But remember that your final product is not all about the sod. At our sod farm we like to say that "your success is our success." A good majority is about all of the preparation that goes into the field before sodding and how you maintain the sod thereafter.

-John Marman

Prep for better bermudagrass establishment

Preparing a good seedbed is critical to establishment and can help prevent problems that are hard to correct later.

Planting dates for seeded bermudagrass vary based on climates. There is no one best date to plant, but rather planting windows. Seeded bermudagrass varieties are best planted in the spring when soil temperatures are consistently above 65 F (18 C) at a 4-inch depth. Optimum soil temperatures for bermudagrass growth and development are 75-85 F.

A soil test is the best means to assess the fertility needs and pH

of the soil. If a soil test is not obtained, it is generally advisable to apply a balanced fertilizer containing N, P, & K. Your local Extension Agent or fertilizer rep can provide recommendations for your area. A soil pH outside the optimum range of 6.0-7.5 should be adjusted to provide a more favorable growing environment. Elemental sulfur or gypsum can be added to lower soil pH, lime can be added to raise soil pH.

Use a non-selective herbicide just before planting to kill weeds or undesirable turf that may compete with the new seedlings. This