

# PREPARING BASEBALL AND SOFTBALL FIELDS

*Editor's note: This material was provided by Turface Athletics.*

**S**pring maintenance on any playing field is a crucial step to ensuring a safe and fun season. To assist groundskeepers and field maintenance workers, here are some maintenance tips to assist with both baseball and softball infield preparation and outfield turf care.

Before starting any maintenance, walk the entire field and evaluate winter damage, vandalism and areas that require special attention. Putting together an action plan to address specific infield and turf needs is the next step.

“Get started as early as weather permits, and be sure to refer back to any plans you were unable to complete the prior year,” said Jeff Langner, brand manager for Turface Athletics. “If you find you need assistance with soil testing, developing a maintenance plan or selecting appropriate products, your local field supply distributor may be a great resource.”

Turf care can be organized by two categories: soil analysis and care, and establishing and maintaining vegetative growth. Soil analysis testing will help you determine pH level adjustments, the need for a fertility program, and the need for pre-emergent herbicides to help prevent weeds. Aerating the field when the temperature is cool will help relieve compaction and improve drainage. Topdressing the field helps modify the soil structure and levels the field which contributes to stronger grass plants.

To establish healthy grass growth, first you'll need to check the irrigation system and quick connects for leaks and damaged heads. Ideally, you'll need to establish a mowing routine that keeps the grass at a manageable and playable height, while never removing more than one third of the leaf. Making sure the mower blades or reels are sharpened is also an important step.

Preparing your infield or clay infield surface not only keeps the field in better condition, it helps prevent lips in skinned and grass transition areas that can lead to serious injury. First, you'll want to remove any grass or weeds on skinned areas by mechanical means or spraying with a turf labeled, non-selective herbicide.

Next, aggressively spike drag or scarify the skinned infield to integrate infield mix that may have segregated over the winter months. Removing any lips in skinned-to-grass transition areas is not only safer, it helps promote drainage and prevents puddling. You'll also need to regrade or add infield mix to fix holes and level the infield area. Mat drag to

smooth the infield and edge the transition areas between skinned areas and turf.

Finally, you'll need to check the conditions of the bases, pitchers mound, batters boxes, bullpen and catchers area for holes and wear. You may want to consider installing specialized professional mound clay or clay blocks to these areas.

## Top Tips for Infield Care

- ⊙ Avoid folding mound and plate tarps; instead, roll the tarp on a tube or PVC pipe and hang for easy storage.
  - ⊙ Rake baselines lengthwise from home toward first and third.
  - ⊙ Make a single pass to “groove” a wet infield mix to create ridges, increasing surface area to speed drying time.
  - ⊙ Hand rake the 12-inch strip along the turf area after you have dragged the rest of the infield.
  - ⊙ Vary your raking start and stop locations as well as drag pattern.
  - ⊙ Use a soil conditioner or a specific drying agent that doesn't break down.
  - ⊙ To fill in holes in batters boxes or mounds with water and a tamp,
- sweep hole clean of loose material, moisten hole, add packing clay, and tamp.
- ⊙ To remove standing water puddles on infields use a cup, sponge or pump, or a drying agent to absorb the remaining water.
  - ⊙ Remove the plugging bases before dragging an infield; rake or drag material from under the base and fill in the sliding pits. Roll or tamp pits.
  - ⊙ To line outfield grass use paint for lines in turf and consider painting lines on skinned area.
  - ⊙ Never leave the field “loose” from scarifying or tilling if heavy rains are expected and the field is to be used soon. ■

