

Advice on topdressing

By Jeff Salmond, CSFM

Topdressing is important if you want to reduce thatch. I feel topdressing aggressively growing grasses helps in breaking down that slimy layer that can exist between the plant and soil surface.

Topdressing is needed to protect turf injury after an aerification, depending on the time of year and timing of sports seasons. During football season, for example, after an aerification, topdressing is important to re-fill aerification holes to help provide vertical and lateral stability. Topdressing at lighter rates is important to "level" divots during the season and protect from further turf injury. Topdressing at heavier rates is important to protect turf heading into winter to help prevent desiccation.

I don't feel that topdressing is always necessary after an aerification process. With little spring activity, I feel leaving the aerification holes open and not topdressing will provide increased rooting and cavities in the soil for which roots and water to travel. However, a light application of sand topdressing during slow spring growth may help increase the soil temperature.

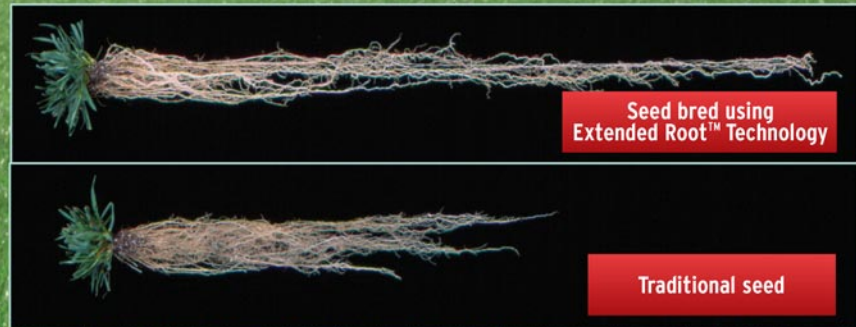
Composition choices could include mixes of different ratios of soils, sands, peats, and calcined clays. For example, a sand-based field rootzone that was originally a 94% sand 6% peat, you might use a 100% sand topdressing that is the same particle size as the sand in the rootzone. On a native soil based field, you might use a well-balanced soil with a little higher sand content mixed with 50% by volume of calcined clay. When you use sand topdressing on some fields, try and stay away from sands with 40% fine/very fine sands.

After the football season is over and your field has been aerified and cores removed, apply a little more than 3/4 of an inch of topdressing over 80,000 square feet, or about 25 tons of sand material. After the sand is spread, allow it to dry and then brush it into the aerification holes and divots. This is the best time to apply a heavy application of sand topdressing while the grass growth has slowed down, allowing the sand to effectively be moved in the aerification holes. The heavy amount also gives you that added protection going into the winter months.

During the season, periodically apply light (1/8 to 1/4 inch) amounts to topdressing between the hashes to help fill divots and protect exposed crowns and rhizomes.

—From Jeff Salmond, CSFM ■

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