

# Illinois parks manager saving money & water with zoysiagrass



>> **CURT STRETCH**, parks manager in Mattoon, IL says his zoysiagrass loves the heat and sunshine.

**C**URT STRETCH, parks manager for the Mattoon (IL) Parks District, reports he is mowing less and saving money on water and fertilizer since sodding some of his baseball and softball fields with zoysiagrass.

"There is less maintenance involved with the zoysia; less water and fertilizer, and less mowing," Stretch says. "And it holds up in the heat of this region; in fact, it thrives on heat and sunshine. In mid-June and July when bluegrass and fescue are taking a beating, the zoysia takes off.

"This year, with all the rain and cool weather we've had it's a bit behind but Eastern Illinois University and the University of Illinois played on it in mid-April when it was still dormant and they loved its shortness and softness, despite it being only halfway green," Stretch says. "It wasn't totally green until May 1. Those two teams have played here the past few years and say it makes for a true and fast infield."

Stretch and his father both have the grass at their homes and he says his friend, Ron Maxwell, owns a golf course in the area that uses zoysiagrass so he knew what he was getting when he decided to use Zenith sod on some of the district's baseball and softball fields. "I have one field where half the outfield is bluegrass and half is zoysiagrass," he

says, "and we mow the bluegrass every 3 days while I've mowed the zoysia only twice since April [we spoke May 14]. And I knew it would hold up to the heat."

The district has 15 ball diamonds and Stretch reports his water bill has been cut substantially since he began using zoysiagrass. "Our water bill went from \$6,000 to \$800, which is considerable and I'm able to spend that money elsewhere. Water does help the zoysia but it doesn't need it with its 15-inch roots.

"And in August we only have to mow it every 10-12 days."

Stretch also reports he can keep the zoysia at ¾-inch height of cut and also needs only to spray a low dose of Roundup on the still-dormant zoysiagrass in the spring to kill any emerging weeds. "I also

apply some ROOTS turf food twice a year and add in a little bit of nitrogen," he says.

He says he did use zoysiagrass seed on one Little League outfield and it took until the 3rd year before it really took off in growth. It is hard to grow it from seed because you have to be patient while it establishes. "In the infields I've used it though it is the opposite of other grasses; I put seed down in June and July and those little seeds thrive in the heat."

Stretch says he has not had any thatch or disease problems with the grass but that he does use a power edger about once a week. "We go a bit deeper because it will grow out but using the power edger will keep it straight and there's no encroachment." ■



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