

From the Sidelines



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Fasbender on football fields

ERIC FASBENDER, CSFM, assistant director of athletic facilities at Louisiana State University, spoke at the STMA Southeast Regional event this summer as part of the Football track. Here are some highlights from his talk about maintaining all the football turf square footage in Baton Rouge:

Fasbender said LSU uses bermudagrass because of its durability and resiliency on its three outdoor natural turf fields (there is also a synthetic field inside and one outside). He said aeration is the most important cultural element for bermudagrass and aerates each of his fields at least six times per year using hollow tines to pull cores.

“Not only to reduce compaction but to increase the oxygen level of the soil profile and also as an assist for seedbed preparation,” he said. “When you chop up the rootzone it also stimulates rhizomes and stolons.”

Fasbender said mowing was the second most important practice. “How you finish off a field and have it super tight is so important,” he said. He suggested finding your field’s ideal height of cut and staying at that number. He cuts Tiger Stadium’s field to 5/8 inches.

He recommends verticutting twice a year but said he knows not many turf managers do it, either because of a lack of time or equipment. LSU’s home turf at Tiger Stadium gets verticut three times just between Memorial Day and Labor Day, Fasbender said. “Verticutting eliminates thatch and stimulates growth, and also assists in preparing a seedbed,” he said. “You should always fertilize and let the turf rest following a verticut.”

Bart Scott from Mississippi State commented from the audience, “We verticut about 2 inches after every season!” Fasbender replied that was almost like tilling.

Fasbender recommended using USGA-specified sand when topdressing; he recommends topdressing 4-5 times a year, ideally after verticutting and after every other aeration, at a rate of 1/8 to 1/4 inches. Choose your topdressing material to match your soil profile; he said this helps protect the plants and avoids layering problems.

On overseeding, Fasbender said to seed at the lowest possible rate somewhere between 4 and 12 pounds per 1,000 square feet to help with your spring transition back to bermudagrass. He also recommended using turf colorants to dye your bermudagrass green later in the season and said some dye colorant products include nutrients that help prolong the growing season, in part because the colorant attracts heat.

Using colorants also is a great way to use lower seeding rates of ryegrass, he said, and you can mask the bermudagrass color during transition periods.

Fasbender said he tests his soil every 3 months, calling it “a huge tool for more efficiency.” You might learn for example that you don’t need to put any fertilizer out at a particular time. He said he uses nitrogen in spring and then in the fall for recovery he likes potassium for its “being a plant catalyst.”

Regarding irrigation, Fasbender said he waters as little as possible—“a little bit of stress is okay. Try shutting off your system and see what happens. How long will it be before you see stress?” He recommends deep, infrequent watering.

He strongly recommends turf managers do not water on game day. “Our last cycle runs Friday morning for a Saturday game. We turn off the backflow valve; we do not want water on the field before the game,” he said. “It adds to the ‘snot layer’ and makes the field too slick.”

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