



## Q&A with Dr. David Minner

Professor, Iowa State University

**Questions?** Send them to David Minner at Iowa State University, 106 Horticulture Hall, Ames, IA 50011 or email [dminner@iastate.edu](mailto:dminner@iastate.edu). Or, send your question to Grady Miller at North Carolina State University, Box 7620, Raleigh, NC 27695-7620, or [emailgrady\\_miller@ncsu.edu](mailto:emailgrady_miller@ncsu.edu).

# Advice on September seeding project

*I've been gathering information to renovate our 20-acre baseball, softball, and soccer complex in Wisconsin and I was looking for a second opinion on some of my thoughts and concerns. Work starts in mid-June with removal of trees, fences and installation of water, sewer, and power. We have an expected seeding date around 20 September, but I'm pushing to seed by Labor Day.*

*Ron Novinska, Oregon School District (WI)*

A second opinion is a great idea with the plethora of turfgrass information out there these days. It certainly can be confusing when you get two completely different answers to the same question. Many times an "expert" will have to generalize because the situation is not fully understood. Ron has done his homework and is now faced with making the best choice for his specific situation. Getting a second, third, and fourth opinion is a good idea because it brings out specific experiences that others have had, and the voice of experience is always a good thing.

*What is your thought on using a Kentucky bluegrass blend vs. a mixture of Kentucky bluegrass and perennial ryegrass on a bare ground seeding in September?*

Ron used the National Turfgrass Evaluation Program (NTEP) to evaluate the performance of local seed suppliers. He chose a Kentucky bluegrass blend containing Shannon, Midnight, Sombrero, Fullback, and Gaelic because three of the varieties were in the top 10 according to NTEP overall quality ranking; nice work, Ron. His specific question was, should these Kentucky bluegrass varieties be used alone or should they be mixed with 15% perennial ryegrass? It is a standard practice to mix perennial ryegrass and Kentucky bluegrass for many turf applications. The ryegrass germinates faster and that helps with grow-in, especially if the seeding date gets toward the end of September.

However, for higher end baseball fields I have stopped using ryegrass in the mixture because coaches are complaining about the ryegrass forming clumps and seed heads that are unattractive, difficult to mow, and make

the ball bounce erratically. The ryegrass may never become a nuisance when fields are actively growing and adequately maintained with water, fertilizer, and mowing. But, I too have experienced unfavorable appearance and playing conditions when ryegrass clumps green up faster in the spring, or remain green and clumpy when fields dry. Then in May and June the ryegrass seed heads can completely evade reel mowing and often look stemy and objectionable even with rotary mowing.

We have overseeded ryegrass into compacted areas near dugouts, on deck circles, and outfielder areas, only to have the coach chastise us after the forbidden ryegrass turns ugly. So I have said goodbye to rye on my baseball fields because of coach's preference, and I agree with them on this one. Most of you don't like it when I make this comment but remember to a certain extent we are here to serve the coach and players, so openly listen to their opinion. If they don't mind the playing quality of ryegrass then it ain't broke and don't need fixing. The same case can be made for Ron's competition and practice soccer fields even though ball roll is not quite as important as it is in baseball. The density, low mowing, and playing quality of today's improved Kentucky bluegrass varieties do not need any assistance from perennial ryegrass. Overseed any worn or thin areas with more Kentucky bluegrass if needed during the first playing season. In a year or two if worn areas continue you can always turn to perennial ryegrass to help maintain 100% turf cover. Once you start adding perennial ryegrass to a field it will never leave or revert back to a monoculture of Kentucky bluegrass without killing

everything and starting over. Don't get me wrong; perennial ryegrass is a very important grass for many sports turf situations, just realize what you are getting into; and for me, I am starting to consider ryegrass a weed in my bluegrass baseball fields.

Ron had more questions on how to ensure better establishment since Kentucky bluegrass establishes so slow and his practice soccer and softball outfields will be watered with a large, commercial traveling gun. *"The person overseeing the grow-in wants to use compost as a mulch for the seed. I was thinking of using a mulch like Encap and incorporating the compost into the topsoil instead. I don't know if the compost will hold moisture like mulch."*

Compost will increase water holding both within and on the surface of the soil, so it's a good choice to use well decomposed compost for your project. Even better is your decision to incorporate the compost into the surface 2 inches and then add the pelletized mulch over the surface to further speed establishment. The pelletized mulch is better than compost at sealing the surface and reducing evaporation. It also helps protect seedlings from being dislodged when the large water droplets from the rain train impact the surface. Your skills will be tested to devise a method of keeping the surface adequately moist and at the same time driving or walking on the surface to pull out the traveling gun. Keep the surface inch wet during the first 2 weeks to avoid delayed germination.

Regardless, the pelletized mulch should help you with both tasks. They also make fertilizer impregnated mulch that will help

*Continued on page 49*

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## Q&A with Dr. David Minner

Continued from page 50

speed establishment. The strongest recommendation I can give you and the factor that will likely impact your success the most will be the seeding date. Construction projects are notorious for being delayed if you don't stay on top of the progress. Get the irrigation in as soon as possible even if it means seeding and watering some fields before others are completed. Set a seeding date of August 20

and hope for September 1. There is a huge difference between seeding the first of September compared to the end of September. Your target should be 100% turf cover by mid-October; more specifically no soil showing, two or more tillers on plants, and grass at a height that would require mowing. In my opinion you've got a fun project and a good plan; now make it happen. ■