



From the Sidelines

Eric Schroder
Editorial Director
eschroder@specialtyim.com
717-805-4197

Compost and your fields

I thought it might be a good idea to share some information on using compost on sports turf as a rootzone mix or topdressing; this topic may become more important to you if the trend of banning pesticides continues to grow (pun intended).

According to the abstract of a paper titled "Organic Land Care Practices in Maintaining Sustainability of Athletic Field Turf," presented at last fall's big agronomist conclave in Tampa by William M. Dest, University of Connecticut, and Jeffrey S. Ebdon, University of Massachusetts, there is increased interest in organic land care practices in lieu of using conventional practices that use pesticides and standard fertilizer compounds. "However, as the conversion from conventional practices to organic methods takes place, there is no science-based information related to its use on turf sustainability and field safety," say the authors.

To remedy that, they conducted research beginning in 2010 examining the long-term effect on turfgrass sustainability, playing quality characteristics and soil quality using an organic land care system compared to a conventional maintenance system using Integrated Pest Management. Re reported results through 2012, the authors say the only difference in turf quality between the organic and conventional treatments was in 2011 at a 2.52 inch mowing height "because of the ingress of crabgrass into the organic plots thus providing a significantly lower rating than the conventional treatment that received a post application of herbicide to control the crabgrass." They reported that wear injury was significantly greater at this mowing height during the Fall of 2011 and 2012 compared to the 1.25 inch height because of continuing crabgrass competition which was absent on the 1.25 inch mowing height plots.

"This also affected slower spring recovery at the higher mowing height," they wrote. "There was no difference in root biomass between the

organic and conventional management systems taken from samples in 2012. Infiltration rates were not significantly different between the two systems in 2011 and 2012."

Here's how to get started on compost applications, courtesy of a Sports Turf Managers Association Bulletin:

Consult schools, campuses, or your own facility to obtain raw materials for composting. Common raw materials used include:

- Coffee grounds
- Animal manure – poultry, horse, cattle
- Leaves
- Grass clippings and yard waste (Try to avoid using plant waste treated with herbicides, as this could be problematic in finished compost. Always read the pesticide label to see if clippings from treated turf can be used for compost.)
- Wood chips and sawdust
- Clean paper, cardboard, and shredded newspaper
- Food waste from dining facilities excluding dairy products, fats, grease, lard or oils, meat or fish bones and scraps

These materials can be combined into piles, rows or vessels at appropriate proportions to reach a 30:1 (or less) carbon to nitrogen ratio. Organic materials that contain nitrogen include grass clippings, food waste, coffee grounds and manure. Organic materials that contain carbon include dry leaves and woody materials. The pile should be kept out of direct sunlight and moisture content should be carefully monitored so the pile does not become too wet or dry.

To reach a finished product, mature compost requires proper aeration, consistent particle size, sufficient moisture, and high temperatures. The time frame for proper decomposition varies depending on if all of these factors are met and also the method used (piles versus in-vessel). Some sports fields will have multiple piles in various stages of decomposition so compost is available when needed. ■

SportsTurf

EPG Media/Specialty Information Media
3300 Fernbrook Lane N,
Suite 200, Plymouth, MN 55447

The Official Publication Of The Sports Turf
Managers Association

SportsTurf

MANAGERS ASSOCIATION

President: David Pinsonneault, CSFM, CPRP
Immediate Past President: James Michael Goatley, Jr., PhD
President-Elect: Allen Johnson, CSFM
Secretary/Treasurer: Jeff Salmond, CSFM
Vice-President Commercial: James Graff
Professional Facilities: Phil McQuade
Academic: Jeffrey Fowler
Higher Education: Tim Van Loo, CSFM
Parks & Recreation: Sarah Martin, CSFM
K-12: Andrew Gossel
Commercial: Doug Schattinger
Elected-at-Large: Mike Tarantino, CSFM
Elected-at-Large: Bradley Jakubowski
Chief Executive Officer: Kim Heck

STMA OFFICE
805 New Hampshire Suite E
Lawrence, Ks 66044
Phone 800-323-3875 Fax 800-366-0391
Email STMAinfo@STMA.org
www.STMA.org

EDITORIAL
Group publisher: Jeff Patterson
Editorial Director: Eric Schroder
Technical Editor: Dr. James Brosnan
Art Director: Brian Snook
Production Manager: Karen Kalinyak

Stma Editorial Communications Committee
Chairman: Brad Jakubowski; Tyler Clay;
Jim Cornelius, CSFM; Mark Frever, CSFM;
Jamie Mehringer; Scott Stevens; and Brad Park



SportsTurf (ISSN 1061-687X) (USPS 000-292) (Reg. U.S. Pat. & T.M. Off.) is published monthly by Specialty Information Media at 75 Pike Street, Port Jervis, NY 12271. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Sportsturf, PO Box 2123, Skokie, IL 60076-7823. For subscription information and requests, call Subscription Services at (847) 763-9565. Subscription rates: 1 year, \$40 US & Poss.; 2 years, \$65 US & Poss.; 1 year, \$65 Canada/Foreign Surface, 1 year, \$130 Airmail. All subscriptions are payable in advance in US funds. Send payments to Sportsturf, PO Box 2123, Skokie, IL 60076-7823. Phone: (847) 763-9565. Fax: (847) 763-9569. Single copies or back issues, \$8 each US/Canada; \$12 Foreign. Periodicals postage paid at Port Jervis, NY and additional mailing offices. COPYRIGHT 2014, SportsTurf. Material may not be reproduced or photocopied in any form without the written permission of the publisher.