



From the Sidelines

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

Winter is coming

write on the first day of autumn, a windy day in south central Pennsylvania that won't see 70 degrees. Earlier today I made note of which tree branches threatening the house need to come down before the snow flies, and thought I would share some ideas for preparing your football or soccer fields for winter in the cool-season turf regions. I turned to a great source of information—STMA's Technical Bulletins, available at www.stma.org.

"Cool-season grasses get a flush of growth in the fall. It is important to fertilize these grasses during this time to maintain healthy growth and enhance recovery from wear. With proper fertilization, your field has the best chance to go into the winter with a high amount of turf cover. Apply 1 lb. of nitrogen per 1000 ft² in mid-October and after the first hard frost. You can wait until after the season to combine the final fertilizer application with post-season hollow-tine aerification and seeding. Do not apply excessive amounts of nitrogen within a few weeks before the first expected frost. Too much N at this time results in extreme plant succulence, which can lead to cold injury.

"Begin overseeding following the first game with perennial ryegrass and continue seeding throughout the season. Over time you will build a "seed bank" that will help maintain cover during the fall and into the winter. Also, some of the seed that does not germinate in the fall will germinate in the spring. Focus your overseeding on the high wear areas . . . if you can maintain turf in these areas you will have fewer weeds in the spring.

"Fill divots throughout the season with divot mix that contains sand/soil, organic fertilizer, and perennial ryegrass seed. This will help ensure a divot-free field in spring.

"Depending on your location, your turf may be able to begin to recover from damage after the season if it is still actively growing. If turf growth has stopped, you can still take steps to ensure your field survives the winter. Lower your mowing height to reduce your chances for

snow mold outbreaks and damage. Even if your turf is dormant, aerify with hollow-tines and seed so you do not have to worry about it in the spring when your field may be waterlogged from spring rains.

"Applying topdressing in conjunction with aerification will also improve conditions in the spring. On native soil fields, consider topdressing with compost. Sand-based field should be topdressed with sand that closely matches the particle size distribution of the rootzone. Seed large, worn out areas; sod smaller worn out areas. Even if the sod is dormant, you can install it in places like soccer goal mouths. As soon as the weather warms up, it will start rooting.

"Apply a fungicide to protect against pink and gray snow mold. Check with your local university for recommendations on which fungicides to use. Use growth covers. Growth covers create a greenhouse-like effect that allows seed to germinate and turf to grow during the winter. Consider using growth covers in your high wear areas after you have seeded them. Be sure to apply a snow mold fungicide and remember you'll probably have to take the covers off periodically so you can mow.

"Preemergent herbicides can be applied in late fall for spring weeds BUT it is important to not overseed if you apply a preemergent herbicide because the herbicide will prevent your seed from germinating. If you need to overseed, you can kill weeds in the spring with postemergent herbicides." ■

Correction

There was an omission in last month's article on winter weeds, page 12. In the 2nd paragraph, the 2nd sentence should have read: "In a study conducted during the winter of 2013-2014, plots receiving simulated football traffic in fall contained 35 annual bluegrass plants per 9 ft² compared to less than 2 plants per 9 ft² those not receiving traffic (Figure 1)." We regret the error.

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STMA OFFICE

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

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