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Q&A

BY DR. GRADY MILLER, ENVIRONMENTAL HORTICULTURE DEPARTMENT,
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Have Questions?

SEND THEM TO GRADY AT: P.O. BOX 110670, UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA, GAINESVILLE, FL 32611-0670

I have a good base of bermudagrass but the field has not been taken care of for the past few years. I want to know if I should seed the infield and then put a top dressing of sand or dirt to level it. I have some little spots that need some help. Also, what is the best thing to use to get rid of bahiagrass?

Unfortunately, many fields have periods of neglect due to changes in field managers, poor administration, or lack of adequate funds for year-round maintenance. If you have a good base of bermudagrass and have some time, then you have a number of options. My approach to renovating this baseball field would depend upon how much bermudagrass is on the field and how well is it distributed across the field.

From your note it sounds like bahiagrass makes up the balance of the field not covered with bermudagrass. If that is the case, just seeding bermudagrass is not going to change the overall appearance of the field until the bahiagrass is removed. Bahiagrass can be controlled with MSMA or DSMA (sold under various trade names) at labeled rates. Three to four repeat applications at 7 to 10 day intervals are necessary for control. It is best sprayed in the spring. This program may require treatment for more than one year to remove the bahiagrass. This herbicide can discolor bermudagrass, but this can usually be offset with application(s) of nitrogen fertilizer.

After you have removed the bahiagrass, then you are ready to begin field renovation. Fill in all the low areas with a soil that is similar to the native soil of the field, especially if the low areas are more than an inch below grade. You do not want to use a soil that is too dissimilar to what is below it; otherwise you may have layering that may promote either excessively droughty or wet conditions. You may want to topdress and use a steel drag mat to further level the field's surface. Concentrate on the infield first, but do not overlook the low areas in other parts of the field.

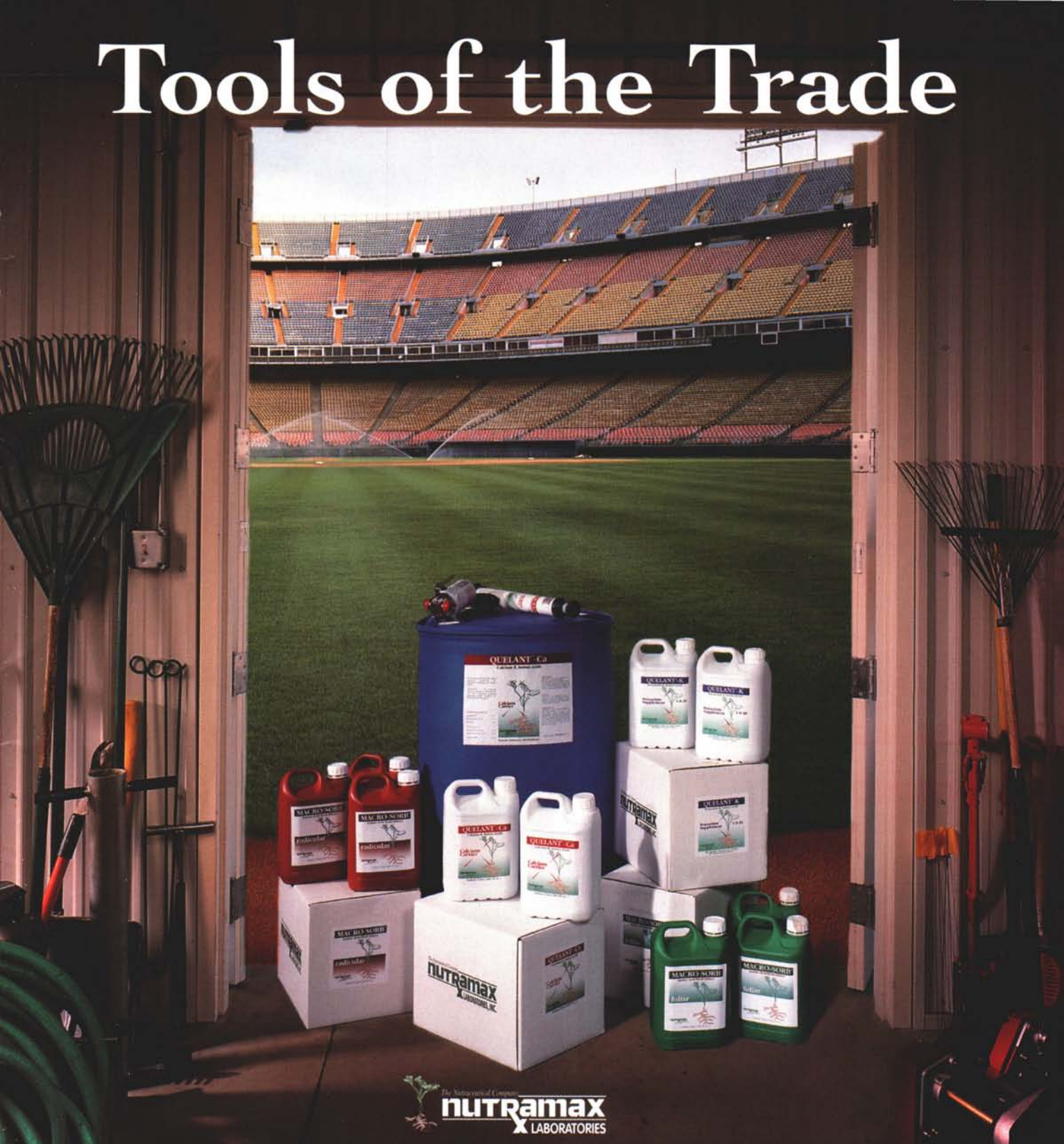
During the renovation, keep in mind that a field should have a 1 percent slope from bottom of the pitcher's mound to beyond the baseline. The outfield should slope 1 percent from the infield skinned area toward the warning track. The slopes will minimize water puddling. This is also a great time to remove any lips that have formed around the skinned areas. Excavate and remove sand/clay soil to create the proper slope required for surface runoff.

With the work completed on the low and uneven areas, you should next concentrate on the grass. If you have at least 50 percent bermudagrass cover, you may elect to initiate an aggressive fertilization program to "grow-in" the field. It is not unusual to have bermudagrass go from 50 to 100 percent cover in 4 to 6 weeks using high rates of nitrogen fertilizers and adequate irrigation. Apply 3/4 to 1 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet per week using a soluble form of nitrogen (e.g., ammonium nitrate, ammonium sulfate, etc). These high rates should only be used during a short term - until the bermudagrass has fully covered.

If the bermudagrass cover is sparse, you may want to go ahead and seed the field. The ideal time to seed the field is mid-spring to mid-summer. In southern Florida, seeding may even be performed in late summer with good results. The typical seeding rate is 1 to 11/2 pounds of hulled bermudagrass seed per 1,000 square feet (or 40 to 65 pounds per acre). Use a rotary or drop spreader to apply the seed evenly and at the proper rate. It is a good idea to apply half the seed in one direction, then apply the other half in a perpendicular direction. If possible, carefully rake the seed into the soil using a leaf rake, and then lightly roll to improve seed-to-soil contact. After seeding, water lightly and frequently to keep the top quarter-inch of soil moist until the seed germinates. As the plants begin to grow, change your irrigation schedule so that you are watering more of the root zone, but less frequently. This will encourage development of a deeper root system.

You mentioned seeding in your note, but realize that sprigging and sodding are commonly used alternative methods of establishing bermudagrass. In fact sprigging is often more cost effective than seeding. Contact you local county extension agent or state turfgrass specialists for a list of cultivars appropriate for your area.

Tools of the Trade



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