

**“Every member of the crew knows the drill: If no one is on the field, grab a rake and hit the edges.”**



door action some time in late November. Christmas break runs through December into early January, and the cycle begins again.

The GMU turf crew works at the baseball field for a minimum of 5 hours every day the field is in use. Sullenberger says, “We use the same attention to detail for practice preparation as we do in our game day prep. We water the dirt as needed to keep the consistency just right. We use our tractor for the infield dragging, doing each step separately, pulling first the spike, then the nail and finally the mat drag. We do the mound and home plate work immediately after games, tarp them overnight, and do our final prep early in the morning. We’ll also do this touchup work on practice days. By 9:30 am the turf is generally dry enough for cutting. We stripe at every mowing. We gradually adjust the height of cut from 1-1/2-inches early in the season up to 3-inches in the hottest part of the summer, back down to 2 inches for fall and winter. We paint lines every other day. We also drag the infield and work the mound and home plate on the practice infield each day. All this is wrapped up by 11:00 am on practice days.”

Sullenberger has put together his own infield mix to deliver the performance factors he’s after. So, after using calcined or vitrified clay products to get the field game ready in wet conditions, the crew may shovel out those areas the next day and rework the dirt to retain the desired consistency. Several times a season the crew will till up the infield skin, box blade it, and rework it. They’ll also dig out the mound and rebuild it several times during the season to insure the best possible playing conditions.

“During the season, the infield dirt kicked into the grass creates a lip. The

turf crew and baseball team rake the infield dirt from the grass every day to reduce the chances of bad hops and injuries,” says Sullenberger. “Every member of the crew and the team know the drill: If no one is out on the field, grab a rake and hit the edges. We’ll also hose out the edges periodically and occasionally roll them.

“From February through May, an inch of grass per week is edged out of the entire infield to reduce the lip and to make the transition from infield to grass smoother and more even. At the end of the season, we sod around home plate and the baselines. This reduces the diameter of the home plate circle and the width of each baseline, setting up the field for the season-long edging out process.”

Residential areas and woodlands border the campus. The neighborhood and GMU have developed an almost family type relationship. People take walks around the campus; deer, birds and other wildlife take shelter among the trees. Twice each year, a neighborhood picnic is held on the softball field. In return, the neighboring families walk the campus on pickup detail four times a year. GMU has initiated an outreach program for the children of families in nearby public housing facilities, providing them with free access to the GMU sports camps.

Sullenberger says, “I can’t say enough about the administration here, they’re terrific. Their outreach programs are just one example of that. They stand behind our program 100 percent and have put their trust in us. Their support is what has enabled us to grow and move forward.”

Perhaps the most unique feature of the baseball field is the sports turf crew that maintains it. The pitching coach for the Patriots Baseball team works on the crew. So do several former GMU players now playing in the minor leagues who have a love for the game and now a unique respect for and pride in the park. Each player on the team arrives early on rainy days to pull the tarp, squeegee, drag, rake, carry sand bags, and bags of calcined clay whenever necessary.

Sullenberger’s enthusiasm and commitment are so contagious, the crew can’t help but be motivated. In fact, that attitude radiates to all those around

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him. The sports turf crew will cheerfully move mats for the cheerleaders or provide help for a stalled car in the parking lot. The administration will surge onto the field to pull tarp at his call for help. And, as he's quick to point out, his wife Heather is not only his top supporter, she's also caught his enthusiasm for the field and will set aside her law books to pull tarp or even set bases.

Just as the constant attention to detail builds field endurance, Sullenberger insists on the same performance level among the crew. He says, "All the players

on my crew have to work out four times a week, either hit the gym or run. We're just like an athletic team. Our performance counts, so we treat each day like the fourth quarter of a football game. I really believe that failing to prepare is preparing to fail."

ST

*Suz Trusty is communications director for the STMA. She can be reached at 800-323-3875.*

## Spuhler Field maintenance program

### March

Early season maintenance as needed and weather permits.  
Deep tine aeration using 1-inch hollow tines with penetration 7-8 inches in depth  
Mat drag to break up and work in plugs  
Mow three times per week at 1-1/2 inch height of cut\*  
Fertilize with 20-4-10, 15 50-pound bags  
Overseed with perennial ryegrass-bluegrass mix at 7 pounds per thousand squared feet  
Control products applied only as needed following standard IPM practices (March - October)

### April

Fertilize with 0-0-50 sulfate of potash  
Mow three times per week at 1-1/2 inch height of cut\*  
Core aerate, deep tine aerate with needle tines, or slice turf (As often as needed - and possible with field use schedules. April - October)

### May

Fertilize with 14-0-25, 92 % MESA, 1.8% Fe, SOP, at the rate of 1.15 pounds of N per thousand square feet  
Mow three times per week at 1-1/2 inch height of cut\*

### June

Fertilize with 15-2-5, 40 % MESA with .2 % Merit, at the rate of 1.15 pounds of N per thousand square feet  
Mow three times per week at 2 inch height of cut\*

### July

Fertilize with 14-1-14, 50% Milorganite, 50 % MESOP, at the rate of 1.15 pounds of N per thousand square feet  
Mow three times per week at 2-1/2 inch height of cut\*

### August

Fertilize with 14-1-14, at the rate of 1.15 pounds of N per thousand square feet  
Mow three times per week at 3 inch height of cut\*

### September

Fertilize with 14-1-14, at the rate of 1.15 pounds of N per thousand square feet  
Mow three times per week at 2 inch height of cut\*

### October

Fertilize with 19-0-19, 62% MESA, at the rate of 1.15 pounds of N per thousand square feet  
Mow three times per week at 3 inch height of cut\*

### November

Fertilize with 19-0-19, at the rate of 1.15 pounds of N per thousand square feet  
Mow three times per week at 2 inch height of cut, weather permitting\*  
Late November, blow out irrigation lines and winterize pump house

### December

Hope for insulating blanket of snow

### January 14th - First day of practice season

Daily field maintenance begins - including spike drag, nail drag, mat drag, raking, watering and tamping

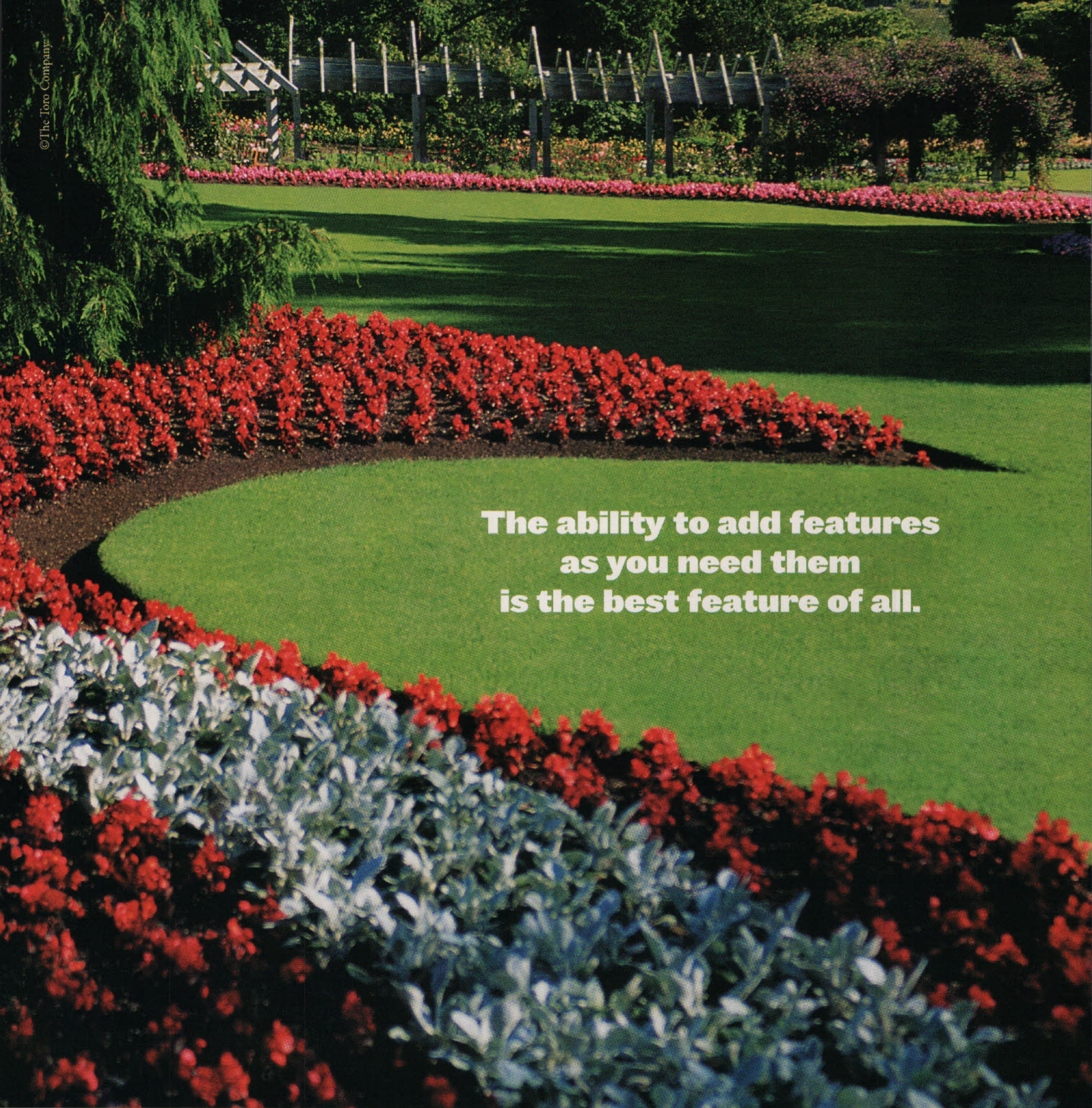
### February

Daily field maintenance continues - including spike drag, nail drag, mat drag, raking, watering and tamping

\*The turf always is mowed on game days, and is double cut if conditions and time allow it.







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# How to get quick green-up

BY CHRIS HARRISON

**I**t's true: sports turf managers like cars that are fast, runners that are fast, and fields that green-up fast when they need it to grow.

Whether it is getting a quick start on a field in spring or fast rebound coming out of the summer slump, there is no single answer to making grass grow. Listen to a cross-section of professional managers, however, and you'll get some good ideas. Two in particular stand out: first is a proper fertility management program. The other is judicious use of turf tarps.

## Fertility

"Start out by putting down 1.0 to 1.5 pounds of N in November," advises Ohio State University sports turf extension specialist Pamela Sherratt. Her recommendation is for fields on a latitude with Columbus. Farther north, that schedule should be stepped up. Farther south, it can be pushed back to early December.

"You want to apply a quick-release nitrogen source," Sherratt continues. The idea is to get plants to take up N quickly, but not use it for growth. The N is stored for the following season.

Darian Daily, director of stadium grounds for the Columbus (OH) Crew Stadium, recommends using urea and iron "if you're on a budget." His pro soccer stadium is a bluegrass base with ryegrass overseed.

"We use a granular 32-3-10 with 3% iron, 50% slow release," Daily says. "We apply 2 pounds per 1000 in November or December, usually after the completion of our season. We then apply the same granular product the first of March."

Once grass starts to green up, Daily lowers the mowing height from 1 3/8-



Columbus Crew Stadium

inches to 1.125 inches. "We mow the pitch and then raise the mowing height back up," he says. "I found that dropping the mowing height thins out dead and brown leave blades. When new growth happens, it gives the appearance of a greener pitch."

Another tip to reduce stress on the field is to rotate the location of team drills. Spring baseball practice and summer lineman drills hurt grass just when it needs to be its greenest.

Make it easy for the coach to change the location of the drills, even to providing striping on the field in alternative locations. Use a good

fungicide in the spring to help the program along.

In addition to the nitrogen hit, Sherratt recommends applying potassium for winter hardiness. A 3-1-2 complete fertilizer or a 2-1-2 will do the trick.

"We've seen a good 14-21 day advance on spring green-up with this program," Sherratt says.

If timing is off, the biggest downside is the loss of the N. In long grass, it leaches. In shorter grass it could burn the leaves, but the grass will rebound. With a good late fall program, there is no need to apply more N until May, Sherratt says.

## Tarps

There is no doubt in Daily's mind that a grow tarp will make all the difference in the world for getting grass growing in tough conditions.

The stadium is home Major League Soccer's Columbus Crew. It is fair to say that the 22,555-seat facility is the most extravagant monument to the





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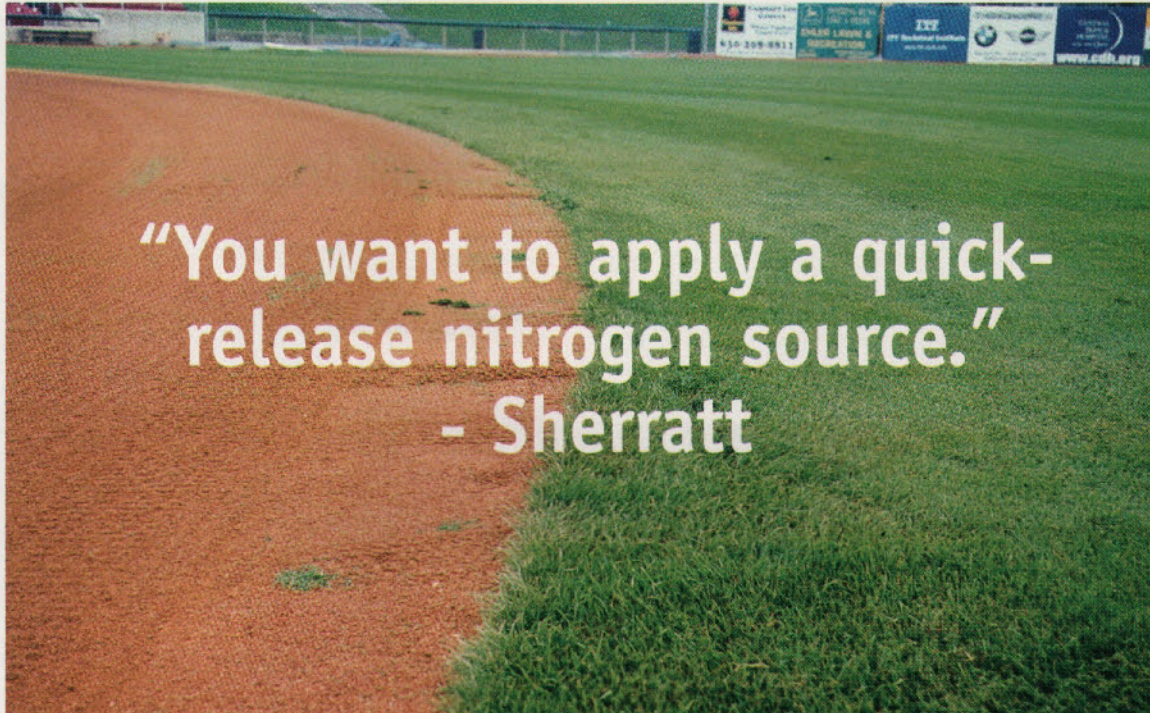
"Use a grow tarp," Daily says unequivocally. "We use Evergreen from Covermaster." The tarp is used like a greenhouse. "We have five sections that cover our entire 102,564 square feet," he continues.

Daily has a word of caution. "Watch out for frost," he says.

Boyd Montgomery, groundskeeper for Sylvania Recreation near Toledo, OH, is sold on tarps, too. He told listeners at the Ohio Turf Conference that he has a half dozen tarps which he puts together to make one good cover.

If the purpose of a grow tarp is simply to serve as a temporary greenhouse, why not put down some clear plastic and simply toss it at the end of the season? Montgomery does not see any percentage in that.

"A 60-foot by 200-foot tarp will cost you about \$1200, he says. "It's a good tool and worth the money."



Keep in mind that grow tarps are not solid sheets of plastic. They are made of a woven material that allows heat and water to pass through.

"Most grow tarps come with a 5-year warranty," Montgomery says. Divide the cost by even that minimum life expectancy and it really is less costly than plastic . . . without the disposal problem.

Daily agrees. "If things are tight, choose one area of the field that needs it most and use it there." If there is only one tarp, try it first

at midfield between the hash marks. Or, on a soccer field, put a tarp by the goal mouths.

"We did an experiment, just covering the center of the pitch and we found that we had a huge green-up under the cover," Daily says. The weather determines if he covers or not. "If we are going to get a long period of cold or frost, we will cover so that we can keep the green longer."

Of course, not all stadiums are in the north. In the Southern United States, Bermudagrass is the turf of choice. "On Bermudagrass, lightly paint with Green Graphics or Lesco Green," advises Tom Burns, grounds manager with the Texas Rangers, Arlington, TX.

The playing surface of The Ballpark is Tifway 419 Bermudagrass. The sod was grown on a farm in Granbury, TX, and was laid in 4x100 foot strips on the field in October 1996. Drainage lines are laid every 15 feet over the entire field. The playing surface is then covered by 4-5 inches of pea gravel and 14-15 inches of sand mixture as the field is expected to have the capacity to drain 9-10 inches of water per hour.

The field's irrigation system allows the entire outfield to be watered from one station, producing 750 gallons per minute or 50,000 gallons per hour, as compared to 18,000 gallons per hour in Arlington Stadium.

If money were tight, Burns says he would buy a single grow tarp and move it around, and making the infield the first place to cover.

Burns says tarps are handy for germinating seed. "A good tarp will speed germination by 50 percent or more," he says.

However, a tarp is not something a manager can roll out and forget. Once outside temperature reaches 60 degrees, the tarp should be pulled.

"Remember, if it is 60 degrees air temperature, that means under the tarp it is 70 degrees," Daily says.

Burns agrees. "If you keep a tarp down more than a few days, you're going to have problems with pythium and a broad spectrum of patch diseases," he warns.

Burns offers two further bonuses to using a grow tarp on newly seeded areas. First, they keep birds away. In areas where birds are troublesome, this alone can be worth the price of the tarp.

Second, tarps minimize erosion. Tarps cut both water erosion and wind erosion.

Storage is not a big problem. "We roll them up on 4-inch drainage tubes," Daily says. "I would suggest that people use a larger diameter tube, say 18-24 inches, to roll the tarps. We use the tubes because we have a forklift to move them around the stadium. People without fork lifts can fold them up and handle them by hand," he adds. "They are not that heavy."

#### Final tips

Sometimes it is tough to get grass green in August, just before the start of

Continued on page 26

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