

# NOT SO FRIENDLY LOW PLACES



**I AM THE** baseball coach in Cumberland, MD, and also take care of the fields. I have two low areas in the infield, one near first base and another near third. These two areas hold up to 3 inches of water after a rainstorm with no possibility of draining. I have plans to fill in with topsoil and seed. Any recommendations?

I have a new seeded soccer field that has pocket areas between stands of grass that have nothing but the dirt exposed. In most cases throughout the field, there is a depth of at least 1 inch lower than the grass. It resembles a cow pasture. Do I need to topdress with dirt the entire field to get the surface level with the existing areas then seed, or just overseed again and again until grass starts to grow in the bare spots between the pockets of existing grass?

Ohio

These two questions have some similarities so I thought would address them together. I assume in the first scenario from the seed comment that the location of the low areas should be growing turf rather than clay (skinned areas). I also assume the field has some type of cool-season grass. If it were a warm-season grass such as bermudagrass then my recommendations would be a little different.

If the field has localized drainage problems, I would first try to correct them. Core aeration would be a typical plan of attack. If the sites are small and/or an aeration machine is not readily available, then you may just want to get a heavy-tined pitchfork, force it into the soil, and move it back and forth to "shatter" the hard area. Then you can fill in with topsoil (hopefully one with significant sand fraction to aid drainage) and seed. You may want to lightly rake the seeded area to cover the seed with 1/8 an inch or so of soil, lightly tamp, and then water. If possible, keep traffic off until the seeds germinate and begin to grow.

If the low areas are due to localized wear, you may have to topdress these areas more frequently to try and prevent them from re-appearing. I would also suggest that you fertilize these high-wear areas a little more often than the surrounding areas to promote rapid regrowth of the turf. More frequent aeration of the areas would also be beneficial. Never be afraid of treating problem areas differently than the rest of the field.

While you are addressing the low areas, make sure you check the slopes around the infield. Deal with any high spots that are preventing surface drainage around the base paths or on the sidelines. Working the clay may have resulted in the base paths becoming elevated in respect to the infield, or there may be a clay lip at the outer perimeter of the infield clay.

The second question is a little different in that it is a new field. Also, since it is a soccer field there is no clay baseline to maintain, resulting in an easier turf maintenance situation. I grew up on a cattle farm, so I am very aware of cow paths and wallows. With bare ground soil subsidence and erosion becomes an increasingly severe problem. You did not mention why it is bare (i.e. erosion during establishment, poor seed distribution, disease, or insect damage). If the bare area is a symptom of something, you should first address that problem. If you are unsure of the diagnosis, you may want to contact your local county extension agent for a second opinion.

If the low areas on the field are more than about 1/4-inch below the other soil surface, I would go ahead and topdress with a similar soil to the base soil and reseed those areas. One inch lower is too much difference and even if you get the turf established, will still result in maintenance and player safety problems. If the depressions were in that 1/4-inch or less range, then simply seeding as you would for a newly established area would be sufficient. Given growing conditions, you should lightly scratch the soil surface, sow the appropriate seed, apply light topdressing, firm the soil surface, and keep moist.

Both these field managers may want to investigate "laser-topdressing." It is the most effective way to take a field that has a desirable slope, but has a few low areas that need filling. Laser-topdressing can maintain desirable slopes and level areas by strategically placing topdressing material where it is needed. This technology was once considered too expensive except for the elite. But now with competition and better equipment, it may be priced to fit into even low-budget operations. Laser leveling would not replace routine topdressing, but could be used for that occasional field tune-up.

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**QUESTIONS?** Send them to Grady Miller at the University of Florida, PO Box 110670, Gainesville, FL 32611, or email [gmillers@mail.ifas.ufl.edu](mailto:gmillers@mail.ifas.ufl.edu). Or, send them to Dave Minner at Iowa State University, 106 Horticulture Hall, Ames, IA 50011, or email [dminner@iastate.edu](mailto:dminner@iastate.edu).