

Eco-Turf Talk



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2020 in Review by Fred Newcombe



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PJC Organic is the manufacturer of ProHealthy Turf Organic Products & distributor of soil amendments.

We provide product, and support to landscapers, schools & municipalities that want to transition from a conventional approach to an all natural organic turf care program for the maintenance of their lawns and athletic fields.

2021 Product Pricing

Like most things right now, product pricing in the organic fertilizer industry (and others) is not stable. This is being fueled by the 2020 drought affecting the commodities market, instability within the transportation industry, and supply chain disruption. As such, you should plan on a 3-5% increase in product costs when pricing your programs for 2021.

Heading into spring 2020 I would have predicted a banner growing season for turf grass in the Northeast. Instead, high temperatures and low rainfall resulted in moderate to extreme drought conditions throughout the 2020 season. It was not until the 29th of December, that Massachusetts experienced non-drought conditions throughout the state.

During January and February the average maximum and minimum temperatures, as reported at the Boston NOAA Weather Station, were identical: 45° Max & 31° Min, with less than 4" of total snow reported. It appeared that the trend was going to continue through March, with maximum average temps moving up to 50° and minimum temps moving to 35°. Then the brakes seemed to get put on. April saw only a 1° rise in maximum average temp & May's maximum average temps went to 66°, while minimum average temps remained low at 48°.

Since spring soil temps will be lower than air temps, our cool-season grasses were not going to perk up with air temps in the 50's. So, the density and coverage of existing turf we like to see before June to help combat grassy weeds later in the season was not there. As a result, those of us that did early season slit seeding on areas

with poor turf coverage were not rewarded for our efforts.

As we moved into the summer things went from bad to worse. Max average temps moved up to the high 70's and beyond--June: 78°, July: 83°, August: 82°. Temperatures we know our cool-season grasses do not perform in. In addition to more and rapid warming when compared to 2019, this summer also had less than half the amount of precipitation from June to August. (continued)

PJC Featured Service

Across the nation, implementation of green initiatives has become a major strategic goal for communities and institutions pressuring the industry to make changes.

Whether you're looking for organic products, or you want help seamlessly integrating an organic fertilization program into your business, PJC Organic will work with you to tailor an All-Natural Organic Turf Care program that is effective, easy to follow, and fits your business.

Plan now – spring is coming!

2020 in Review (continued)

How do we respond?

We can't control the weather, but there are things we can do to improve the performance of our lawns under these more difficult climatic conditions.

We are performing significantly fewer spring over-seedings on residential lawns: The window to get new seed established has been shrinking over the last couple of years. Our focus has gone to repairing damaged areas with perennial ryegrass (known for its quick germination), and communicating to our residential clients that we are going to work on thickening their turf with a blend of cultivars in the fall (when the growing season is longer).

Emphasize to your clients that they need to mow high and return clippings: Emphasize to your clients that they need to get to a minimum 3-3 1/2" height of cut early in the season and return clippings to build organic matter in the soil that aids in water retention.

Encourage clients to allow their lawns to go dormant come July: Many clients, especially new ones with poor turf coverage, continue to irrigate their lawns and only end up harvesting a bumper crop of crabgrass.

Incorporate Kentucky bluegrass cultivars in fall over-seeding blends: While Kentucky bluegrass can have a shallow root system, higher nitrogen need and a relatively high demand for water, it has the ability to survive during extended droughts and through dormancy. It has excellent recuperative and reproductive ability. It spreads through rhizomes and as a result, can develop a dense stand of turf -- greater than perennial ryegrass and tall fescue -- which is important if our spring seeding window continues to shrink.

Soil test: A soil test is necessary to determine soil amendments, calculate the type and amount of lime needed and also a valuable tool in setting customer expectations and transition times. Correcting pH deficiencies in an organic program is critical to improving biological activity and creating the environment our cool season grasses want to grow in.

So, while we cannot control the weather, there are cultural and program practices that we can employ that will allow our clients' lawns to perform much better over time than their neighbors.

Floating Sports Season Challenges

Covid-19 continues to wreak havoc for Massachusetts high school sports shifting some of their fall season play to February 22nd – April 25th with the spring season picking up April 26th – July 3rd. Of primary concern is player safety on frozen ground, as well as, the significant challenges this will pose for turf managers.

Playing on fields that are typically dormant is detrimental to the turf. When days are warm enough to thaw the first inch of soil there is the potential to severely damage the turf crowns with foot traffic and cleats turning fields to mud. There is also the potential for large divots and ruts to form creating a hazard if the ground refreezes making the fields unplayable.

Damage to fields used consistently from February 22nd - July 3rd will most likely end with bare soil that won't be able to be repaired before summer, allowing for opportunistic weeds to encroach. Past summer trends of high heat, dry weather and watering bans will thwart over-seeding efforts potentially rendering the field(s) unplayable for the fall 2021 season.

If you find yourself in this situation, budget now for extensive repairs in the fall with an aggressive over-seeding plan to reestablish turf density and consider purchasing turf blankets. Turf blankets are a great tool that can be used year after year to extend your growing season and jump start early growth in the spring. If possible, seek out alternative playing fields to help minimize damage to your existing fields.

practical approach, proven products

In the News: Monsanto Updates

January 13, 2021. **A death and settlement as Bayer continues trying to end Roundup litigation.**

[Monsanto Roundup & Dicamba Trial Tracker](#) provides regular news updates regarding glyphosate-based Roundup weedkiller lawsuits.