

Eco-Turf Talk



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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.*

Soil Testing

Take any course on organic lawn care, view an article on the internet or read a book, the first thing you are told to do is take a soil test. So, you dutifully take a soil sample, send it off to a lab; get the results back – then what? If it's not Greek to you, it may be to your clients.

*PJC Organic can provide you with
soil sampling supplies, the report
and product recommendations in
easy to understand format.*

Behind the Seed Crisis by Fred Newcombe

Seed prices took a big leap during 2021. These price increases are the result of a collection of events:

- This Spring and early Summer, ScottsMiracle-Gro acquired two seed companies: Turf-Seed, Inc (Hubbard, Oregon) and Landmark Seed (Albany, Oregon). This shifted seed supplies from the commercial market to the retail market.
- During the pandemic, homeowners purchased more grass seed throughout the Summer of 2020. This left the industry short of seed reserves going into the Spring of 2021 (especially perennial ryegrass), therefore relying on this year's crop to offset the shortage.
- Oregon's Willamette Valley produces almost all of the country's annual and perennial ryegrasses (91%), and fine fescues (93%) due to its usual stable climate for growing cool-season grasses. However, Oregon experienced wildfires in summer 2020, mice and vole damage, an ice storm in mid-February 2021, followed by extreme drought and excessive heat conditions.
- Fewer acres were dedicated to cool-season grasses in 2021, leading to an expected shortage in the harvest of roughly 20% before factoring weather conditions.
- March 1st - June 1st is a critical time for the cool-season grasses

Product Promo Turf Blankets

With the uncertainty of the grass seed market, turf blankets are a great option to increase the success rates and viability of turf. Athletic fields—where use and expectations are high—especially benefit from a little TLC.

Turf blankets help fields recover from the sports season over the winter and get off to a strong start in the spring by:

- Warming the soil and air temperature while allowing light to pass through, therefore promoting faster growth and green-up.
- Minimizing unwanted foot and animal traffic in the offseason.
- Shielding the grass from harsh winter conditions.

*Turf blankets are an
investment that can
be used year after year
with great results. Reach
out for pricing info!*



Why Lime?

Lime can be applied until the ground freezes. Because it can take up to 6 months for lime to affect soil chemistry, the sooner the better. Liming provides 3 potential benefits:

- 1. Improves Soil Chemistry.** The function of lime is to raise the pH of acidic soil so grass wants to grow. Turf grass grows best in soil with a pH of 6.5 – 6.8. Soils with a lower pH are more conducive to growing white pines and oaks than turf grass. pH also affects nutrient availability. Soils in the 6.0 – 8.0 range tend to have the greatest availability of the macro and micro nutrients that the plants need. Below and above this range fewer nutrients are available.
- 2. Encourages Biology.** Both microbial and earthworm activity is affected by pH. Soils that are acidic tend to be fungal dominant while soils that are between 6.5 – 6.8 are more balanced between fungi and bacteria. Balanced microbial activity contributes to the availability of nitrogen, sulfur and phosphorous in the soil. Earthworms also like a pH near neutral so their sticky coating does not dry out. They are natural aerators and help to form soil aggregates.
- 3. Improves Soil Structure.** The formation of soil aggregates helps to improve soil structure. Through the addition of calcium and magnesium soil aggregates become more stable via the formation of organic matter – clay bridges. Aggregate stability increases soil porosity and tilth.

In the News: Monsanto Trial

Roundup cases continue despite—or because—Bayer AG has set aside more than \$14.0 Billion to try to settle all the U.S. Roundup cases involving Monsanto. Bayer AG purchased Monsanto in 2018 for \$66.0 billion cash. The Wall Street Journal opines the deal ranks as one of the worst corporate deals in recent memory and threatens the future of Bayer AG, a 158-year-old company.

The 4th trial currently underway is the case of Donnetta Stephens v. Monsanto Company. The Stephens trial is a “preference” case, because her lawyers informed the Superior Court of the State of California that she was in a perpetual state of pain and losing cognition and memory. Ironic, given that has not dissuaded the Bayer/Monsanto trial lawyers from attacking her memory and changes in information she provided during depositions and interrogatories. Time will tell how well this tact will sit with the jurors.

Visit [Monsanto Roundup & Dicamba Trial Tracker](#) for more information.

End of Season Turf Tips

Soil Amendments: Most soil amendments can be applied until the ground freezes. Apply based on soil test results: lime (calcitic or dolomitic), gypsum, humates, etc.

Mowing: Assuming you allowed turf to grow to 3-3.5”, slowly begin reducing height of cut to prepare for winter. Finish the season at approx. 2 1/2 inches high. Grass that is kept long over the winter promotes snow mold in the spring.

Leaves: mulch leaves back in while mowing to add valuable organic matter –carbon - for as long as practical. After that you can mow and bag (or tarp) removing all leaf litter before the snow. Leaf litter harbors fungi and promotes disease that can damage the grass and plants.

Turf Blankets: protect athletic fields from harsh winter conditions and promote faster growth and green-up in the spring. Allows for late season turf repair and overseeding.

Make Notes for Spring: note any troubled spots so you are ready to top dress, over seed and budget for it in the spring.

Equipment Maintenance: drain gas lines, check fluids, sharpen blades and clean off debris from the season.

Behind the Seed Crisis (continued)

to tiller and fill seed heads. Due to this season's lack of precipitation during this time, yields were expected to be down 50%. The lack of precipitation was the worst it has been in over fifty years.

- Along with the drought, there was a punishing heat wave in June with temps as high as 117°F. This took a toll on harvesting seed: First, grass is cut and then a combine separates the seed from the straw. Due to the drought and high heat, the impact swathing can cause the seeds to break off the stem (called shattering), leading to further yield loss.

In light of all of the above, what was predicted to be a 20% - 50% reduction in crop yield is likely closer to a 70% reduction. While the crops affected have been the ryegrass and fine fescues, the other common cool-season varieties (Kentucky bluegrass and Turf Type Tall fescue) have also experienced upward price pressure because of the lack of alternatives. Simple economics dictates that a scarce supply results in higher prices.

What might we expect going into 2022 and what can we do to prepare for it?

While we will not know anything about the 2022 growing season until we are well into our Spring season, we can expect seed prices to remain high through Spring 2022. Hopefully Oregon and Washington state farmers will see an advantage to placing more acres back into cool-season grass seed production due to the higher seed prices. The same may be true for growers in Minnesota and other north central states suitable for cool-season grass seed production. If we do see an increase in the cool-season seed harvest in 2022, there will be some downward pressure on seed prices towards the Fall.

How might these pressures change our existing programs?

1. ***We need to be judicious when we choose to seed:***

While most of us do not do any lawn renovations in Spring, this would be a real no-no in 2022. Spring overseeding should not be done, unless you know your client has the ability to water (an installed, functioning, properly set-up irrigation system and lives in a community that does not impose outside water restrictions) and has limited areas of thin turf. Wait until Fall!

2. ***Make better choices in seed blends:***

- A number of municipalities we have begun working with have historically been using seed blends like Sun & Shade or Park mixes on athletic fields. These blends contain up to 40% Creeping Red Fescue, which is a good cool-season shade variety. Most athletic fields do not contain significant areas of shade, so it is better to use a Kentucky Blue/Perennial Rye blend.
- Do not seed Turf Type Tall Fescue in the Spring. TTF likes warmer soil temperatures than other cool-season varieties to germinate.
- Consider using blends that contain more Kentucky Blue due to its ability to thrive in cool and hot temperatures, and its ability to spread through underground runners or rhizomes.

3. ***Change how we seed:***

With higher seed prices, the practice of simply broadcasting seed after core aeration may not be the best in Fall. Consider seed slicing in the Fall, so as to better ensure good seed-to-soil contact, increasing the likelihood of seed germinating. If you seed slice, consider seeding at a lower rate.



Check out our [Instagram!](#)