If you do all of the above and more, the chances are you’ll read this article anyway. If you don’t, then I urge you to read on and seriously open up the possibilities of better turf or playing surfaces, and appreciate the potential...

Article written by Steve Jones
Planning

Make time for your operation. Realistically evaluate what you want to achieve and draw up a schedule of how to get there. Included in this schedule should be comprehensive evaluation throughout the year after application.

Timing

Throw away the general rule of thumb for overseeding; that it is best carried out in early Autumn. This can work at any time the soil temperature and epidemiology is favourable.

If you have a comprehensive, efficient irrigation supply the warmer soil and air temperatures the better.

Alternatively, seeding in advance of warm weather or moisture allows utilising quieter times and patiently waiting for germination.

Preparation

In a thin existing sward, consideration of why the grass is struggling is vital.

Evaluate thatch levels, irrigation coverage, wear patterns, drip lines, tree roots and every other possible biotic cause.

This completed - or at least recognised - you are able to proceed with the preparation.

Application

Creating different application types would be my advice.

Broadcasting, drop seeding and drill seeding are all viable, and a consistent effort to do all three gives you a much greater chance of success. These three application types allow seed through the profile at different depths and should increase germination potential. However, following groove creation, drop seeding your seed type is the most effective way ahead.
Once seed has been applied uniformly do not brush, drag or perform any other operations that may move the seed. It generally seems to be standard to brush in the seed, but this only affects the uniform application just performed and tends to leave the seed in clumps. Far better to dress lightly through machine if possible as hand application may also move seed. Once dressed, to fill the grooves a light surface roll or tracking process, with light ground pressure vehicles, may suffice.

I stress light as you really want to press the seed down to make soil contact, and the surface should be left smooth and useable. Obviously the longer foot traffic and play can be omitted the better.

Germination

Assuming great soil temperatures and adequate moisture content, seedlings can appear with certain varieties within 7 days, although generally 14 to 21 may be more likely.

During this germination period, in my experience, irrigation application is really the only controllable resource you have, and consequently the most critical. The surface should permanently be damp. As soon as the surface feels dry and no material particles stick to your hand the surface should be covered with a light sprinkling of water. The more sophisticated your irrigation system then hopefully the greater the coverage and displacement of droplets.

Establishment

As soon as germination has been successful and the sward begins to form, reconsider both irrigation scheduling and duration.

Applications should become more infrequent and heavier, allowing drying time between applications, hopefully preventing damping off.

Management

When the seedlings reach third leaf stage is also a good time to consider first mow.

Generally the temptation to mow this short and early is resisted by the turf manager but grass is resourceful and I feel the earlier the better. Often rotary mowers give a good first cut although cylinders can be used but must be razor sharp to cut the softer tissue of seedlings accurately without tearing.

Following first few mows top dressings may be applied to stabilise the surface and smooth any imperfections. Attempting to achieve the long term desired height of cut as soon as possible should be a prerequisite both for practical and agronomic reasons. Continue frequent dressings and keep a close eye on the irrigation scheduling.
CONCLUSION

Overseeding creates competition particularly with Poa annua (annual meadowgrass) which, as we know, seeds regularly especially during times of stress. A competitive seed bank may help in the fight against Poa annua. Attempt as many differing application types as possible. Continue to evaluate the seeded site for at least a year and make a final assessment at this time.

Many of these techniques can be utilised in bare ground seeding as well as overseeding allowing you direct up close and personal contact with your sward. Anomalies of surface imperfections are noticed and addressed, and a greater instinctive feel is afforded to the turf manager.

Hopefully during this time you will have explored other sight specific issues and created an improved sward or playing surface. Create some time at any point of the year and give this a go.

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