

Turfgrass Selection

Choosing the correct turf species for an athletic field relies on climate and geographic location.



In the warm season region of the United States, Bermudagrass is the preferred species for sports fields. It performs well in heat, has good recuperative potential, tolerates low mowing heights, and provides a fast and dependable surface. Bermudagrass has a low tolerance for cooler temperatures and will go dormant during the winter months.

Photo courtesy of University of California: <http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/TOOLS/TURF/TURFSPECIES/bermuda.html>

For a comprehensive maintenance calendar for Bermudagrass, please visit the following website: North Carolina State University – Bermudagrass Athletic Field Maintenance Calendar http://www.turffiles.ncsu.edu/Athletic_Fields/Default.aspx#MC000024



In the cool season region of the United States, Kentucky bluegrass is the preferred species for sports fields. It has strong recuperative potential and can tolerate mowing heights of one inch or more. It also provides good traction due to its rhizomatous growth habit. However, Kentucky bluegrass has poor heat tolerance and may take up to a year to become a mature stand of turf after establishment.

Photo courtesy of University of California: <http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/TOOLS/TURF/TURFSPECIES/kenblue.html>



Tall fescue can also be used in the cool season region, because it has good wear and heat tolerance. However, once it is damaged, it has poor recuperative potential and its bunch-type growth habit causes a bumpy playing surface. It also does not tolerate low mowing heights very well.

Photo courtesy of University of California: <http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/TOOLS/TURF/TURFSPECIES/tallfesc.html>

For a comprehensive maintenance calendar for Kentucky bluegrass and tall fescue, please visit the following website:

North Carolina State University – Tall Fescue and Kentucky Bluegrass Athletic Field Maintenance Calendar

http://www.turffiles.ncsu.edu/Athletic_Fields/Default.aspx#MC000012

In the transition zone, Bermudagrass, perennial ryegrass, tall fescue, and Kentucky bluegrass have all been used. A common practice is to use Bermudagrass during the summer and overseed with perennial ryegrass in mid-September. Bermudagrass goes dormant in mid-October, but the overseeded perennial ryegrass continues growing in the colder temperatures so there is a consistent and actively growing playing surface throughout the year.

For more information on managing Bermudagrass and perennial ryegrass in the transition zone, please visit the following website:

Purdue Extension and University of Illinois Extension – Bermudagrass for Athletic Fields in Southern Indiana and Southern Illinois

<http://www.agry.purdue.edu/turf/pubs/AY-325.pdf>

To assist in the selection of the best turf species for your field, the following websites have been provided:

University of Kentucky - Selection of Grasses for Athletic Fields

<http://www.uky.edu/Ag/ukturf/Athletic%20Field%20Pubs/selection%20of%20grasses%20for%20Athletic%20fields.pdf>

National Turfgrass Evaluation Project

<http://www.ntep.org/>

Michigan State University – Cool Season Turfgrass Species and Cultivar Selection

<http://www.turf.msu.edu/docs/E2912.pdf>

References: The information for this section was taken from the book Sports Fields: A Manual for Design, Construction and Maintenance by Jim Pulhalla, Jeff Krans, and Mike Goatley.