



IOG

DATA SHEET

TOP DRESSING

Top-dressings are made up from mixtures of organic and inorganic materials and when applied to sports surfaces their main functions are to improve the soil structure, drainage and extend the playing life of the sward.

However, it must be remembered that they are used as soil conditioners and not as major sources of plant nutrients. Where nutrients are required, they can be incorporated as inorganic or organic fertilisers. The benefits of applying top-dressings are as listed below:

- *The production of level surfaces* - These can be obtained by 'rubbing-in' small quantities of top-dressing during the growing season. It is also used for surface repairs during the playing season.
- *Increase soil strength* – With a cricket square or tennis courts it may be necessary to increase the binding strength of the soil to improve bounce or pace, the addition of a clay loam during renovation will increase soil strength.
- *Changing soil texture* – Sand is applied in large amount 100 tonne per winter games pitch, to change soil texture and improve surface drainage. It is important that the right sand is used.
- *Increase of the soil organic matter content* – Improving the organic matter content of the soil increases micro-organism activity, improves the structure and increases the moisture holding capacity
- *The return of nutrients removed by mowing* – During the process of mowing, large quantities of nutrients can be removed, however, these can usually be returned by the incorporation of fertiliser into the top-dressing
- *Control of moss* – Empirical evidence has shown that moss is encouraged by poor surface aeration, excess soil moisture and starved soil conditions. As the application of top-dressings improve these conditions, a reduction in moss can be achieved.

Top-dressings to sports surface are mainly applied at the end of the season. However, where necessary, they can be applied throughout the season. The method of applying these materials varies depending upon the size of the site and the amount to be applied, the commonest systems being those of hand or mechanical spreaders.

Hand applications of top-dressings consist of distributing the material with a shovel and working it in with equipment such as stiff brushes or 'Tru-lutes'. Mechanical applications on the other hand, consist of spreading materials using rotating belt type distributors followed by 'luting' in with either hand or mechanical equipment.

Whichever method is chosen care should always be taken to prevent over-application as this can smother fine grass species, slow down growth and where fertiliser is incorporated, cause scorching of the sward.

For further details about our short courses please contact the address below.