

RUNWAY CARE

The runway grass situation is different than a house lawn. There needs to be a cover on the runway so as to eliminate bare or muddy ground. This is not a problem on lawns without traffic. Thus, do not attempt to apply your lawn practices to the runway.

OBJECTIVE: To keep a cover, brown or green on the runway. Three types of grass are used.

1. Bermuda grass; This is the grass of first choice, but due to the grass life cycle and the terrible soil, a second grass is needed.

2. Rye grass: This grass is an excellent second choice for the runway. Its growth cycle is the opposite of the Bermuda, and provides excellent cover if seeded at a good rate (200lbs per acre). The high rate is needed because it is a bunch grass, i.e.; each seed provides a stand of grass.

3. Weed grasses: These grasses are in the ditches of the runway, and are slowly being replaced by Bermuda and Rye grasses. Without these grasses, the water run off would make bigger ditches than we presently have. A combination of spraying and seeding slowly helps replace these grasses.

CUTTING: The cutting height needs to be such that no one grass is harmed. Cutting too low, less than 2-3 Inches does harm in terms of moisture. The grasses need to provide a ground cover for the soil so as that the moisture is not taken out of the ground too quickly. This also applies to a good stand of Bermuda. Cutting the Rye grass below this level causes it to die off more quickly in hot weather. The weed grasses also die off if they are cut to short. Yes, Bermuda does like to be cut a little shorter. However, Neil Sperry in his book and in the Decatur weekly newspaper, and the Grounds Keeper for the Ranger ballpark, both speak very strongly against cutting too short. The spreading of Bermuda does occur when cut short, but not so short as to lose moisture. Cut your lawn as short as you like but not the runway.

TRASH: Grass trash is an excellent ground cover. The best thing the Rye grass does for the runway is provide a cover for the ground, not only while growing, but more importantly when cut. The direct sunrays did not reach the black dirt and the number of big cracks in the runway is greatly reduced. The amount of trash left on the runway is a function of the height at which you cut the Rye. Cutting the Rye too frequent produces short trash pieces, which rot most quickly. Letting the Rye get nice and tall without going to seed at least twice toward the end of the growth cycle, really helps provide ground cover for the hot weather coming in the summer. The objective is to save moisture by having some type of cover.

SEEDING: The seeding of the Rye grass needs to occur during the first week in September accord to Neil Sperry. The actual germination occurs when the temperature and moisture are present; some time is late September or early October. The rate needs to be high so as to cover the ground, and not at the rate you would do a pasture. The seeding needs to occur 14 day after MSMA has been applied to kill the weed grasses. MSMA needs to be applied when the weather is nice and hot and no rain in the near future. The worst that can happen is you miss the time to apply MSMA, or the effects of MSMA is

weaken because of some weather factor. You must wait the 14 days before seeding the Rye. Seeding is done with one of those pull behind spreaders. Have them place 2800 lbs. of seed in the thing. Wait at least 1/2 hour before driving on the runway with the spread. Hot tires kill the grasses. Set the gate at one inch so one can guess how much it should be open after making a run down the center of the runway.

FERTILIZER: In the past, the runway has been fertilized four times a year, and a few times less. Fertilizing depends on the weather. If the weather is such that the grasses are growing like mad, you will fertilize four times. The marker times are the Rye and Bermuda grasses. You fertilize when you plant the Rye, and you fertilize when it is time for the Bermuda to come on strong, usually late April or early May. January tends to a time when the Rye has used up the September fertilizer. . You may give the Bermuda a second shot if it is coming on strong. The color of the grass is an excellent clue of fertilizer needs. The yellow look is a no no. Telephone Justin Seed and order two thousand pounds of 21-7-14 slow release. One usually needs to give them at least an hour led time before picking it up. Wait at least a half-hour before driving on the runway with the spreader. Hot tires kill the grasses. Set the spreader gate a little under 3 inches. Go down the center of the runway first, and when you do the sides do not let the stuff get on people's lots. Too much fertilizer will kill the grasses. Do not apply on wet grass.

HERBICIDES: There is really no need to apply Herbicides for broad leaf weeds. Broad leafs can be controlled by cutting. The bad grasses are what need to be controlled, especially the Dallas grass in the center of the runway. MSMA needs to be applied when it is hot. One application is all that is needed for the center of the runway. Most of the Dallas grass is gone in the center at present. The ditches are another thing. One application in the ditches encourages the Bermuda and Rye grasses. A second application kills the weed grasses better. One of the problems is that the Bermuda may not have much growth time left for the year. The Rye grass has the problem of germination. It needs a lower temperature and water. Too much water and the seed is gone and so is some bare dirt. So, I just do one application for everything. Your best bet is to have someone do the application. It is very important that there is fourteen days between the herbicide application and the seeding of the runway.

ROLLING: The rolling of the runway is best after a rain. You want to have the ground compressible, but not so wet that you leave ruts from the roller or tractor tires. A slow speed is best. Sometimes it is only possible to roll the center of the runway. It is best to roll before cutting the runway because of trash sticking to the roller. It is also easier to see where you have rolled. One should not roll new Rye grass too soon.

MAKING PROBLEMS: The easiest way to create problems is to care for the runway on your own schedule. The runway should be cared for by the condition of the runway. Fertilize before it rains. Don't cut when it is too wet. The ditch in front of the Chase is the wettest. Sometimes it is necessary to just cut the center of the runway because the ditches are staying wet too long. The biggest problem maker is the cutting of the runway too short. We need the Rye and Weed grasses, to keep the moisture in the ground, and not to encourage the spreading of the Bermuda. The Bermuda will spread more slowly, but more importantly, we will not have bare ground after the other grasses die. .