

Turf Grass



Turf is the term horticulturists use when referring to grass that is mowed and maintained. Turfgrasses serve valuable functional (erosion), recreational (sports) and ornamental (beautification) purposes in our lives and landscapes. The United States has more the 50 million acres of maintained turf on lawns, golf courses, sports fields, parks, playgrounds, cemeteries, and highway rights-of-way.

The annual economic value of this turf is over \$60 billion. Taking care of all that turf requires people who work in many unique careers. Currently there are more jobs than there are people for the jobs. Turf professionals get to work outside, often with their favorite sport, and earn competitive salaries.



There are nearly 1 million U.S. employees involved in the turf industry. These include those that produce seed and sod (a layer of pre-grown grass including soil and roots), landscape designers, golf course superintendents, athletic field managers, lawn care operators and many more. Use of water, selecting the right plant for the right application, protecting the environment, and looking out for wildlife are all part of this career.



Lawns are not a new thing, but they have certainly changed. In medieval times, central grassy spaces were used to graze cattle and sheep. Sheep kept grass at a manageable height before the invention of the lawn mower. Sheep were also used as lawn mowers at the US White House during World War I and World War II. The first lawn mowers were invented in 1830 and now lawnmowers are a \$32 billion industry worldwide.



Meet Brett Oxley

Certified Golf Course Superintendent | Decatur, IL

How did you become involved in turf management?

I got my first taste of turf management when I helped renovate my high school's baseball field while attending junior college. I found out soon after this could be a career option and decided to pursue a bachelor's degree in Turf Management. I worked on a golf course during my final two years of undergrad and became hooked on that part of the turf industry.

How do you try to benefit the environment around your golf course?

On the golf course we help the environment in so many ways. We utilize large buffer zones between treated turf and any bodies of water. Water quality matters to us as our irrigation systems pull from the water sources on the land we manage. We have many pollinator plots established throughout the golf course as well as Eastern Bluebird, Purple Martin, and Barn Owl boxes. There are always sightings of rabbits, deer, and coyotes. We also utilize prescribed burns to manage our 100+ acres of native prairie. We try to limit our inputs and utilize a "spoon feed" method (small doses at regular intervals) of applying any products to our most important surfaces. We also take special care to make sure that we are not applying products to any sensitive areas that may lead to off-target damage.

How does turf management differ from other types of agriculture?

The main difference between turf management and other types of agriculture is that we have a continuous crop and we provide a place for community recreation. The product we produce (playing surfaces) is a perennial plant that can grow almost year round, weather permitting. My job is to make the turf healthy enough to withstand the wear it receives from golfers, while also providing excellent playing conditions. Golf can provide a source of recreation for a person's lifetime and can be shared by any age group.



Teachers, looking for a unique way to link golf and STEM? Check out www.thefirstgreen.org for information on how to connect your students to a golf course!

All photos on this page courtesy of Brett Oxley