



Top Dressing and Incorporating Infield Conditioners

There are two basic ways to top-dress and incorporate infield conditioners on baseball and softball infields, which are also known as the following, the skinned area, the playing surface or the dirt portion of the infield including the pitching mound, baselines, and homeplate. The first is to simply top-dress the playing surface with a quality infield conditioner; top-dressing entails creating thin layer on top of the infield that acts as a blanket over the dirt. Second, and a little more complicated, is incorporating an infield conditioner into the skinned area, followed by a top dressing application. This procedure is usually recommended for poorly graded or very slow draining infields and even hard over-compacted playing surfaces. More time and work is required to do this, and it is usually done during the off-season.

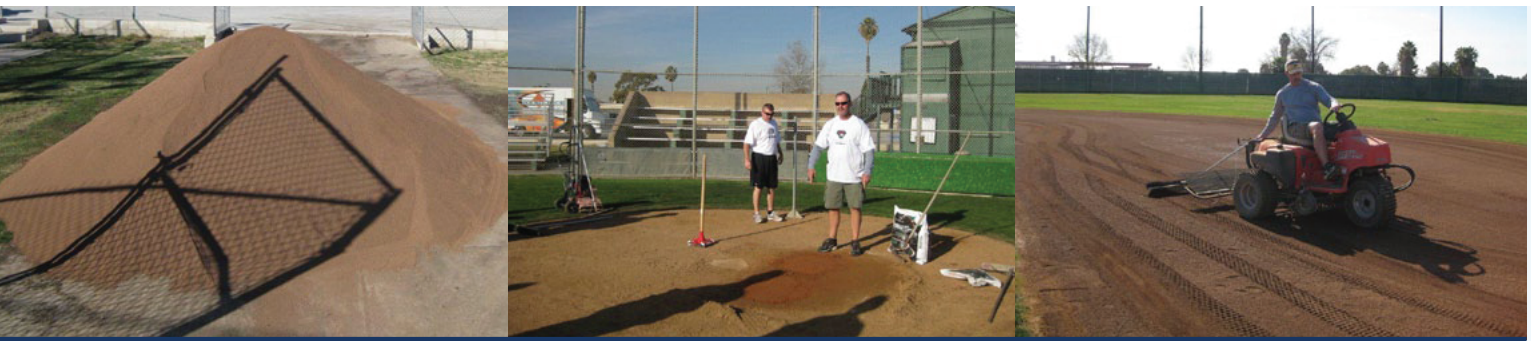
The following explanations are more detailed regarding applications and some of the techniques used. Remember, these are basic instructions, and this technique may not fit every situation. There are many different ways and means to the art of groundskeeping; however, the overall goal should be the same, to create a safe, playable infield surface day and night, rain or shine.

Know your infield(s). A regulation baseball (Major/Minor League, Collegiate, High School) infield, with an infield arc of 95' will have approximately 11,500 square feet of skinned area, which includes the baselines, mound and homeplate. A regulation softball (Professional, Collegiate, High School) field with a 60' arc will have approximately 8,300 square feet of skinned area.

Before the actual top-dressing procedure of applying an infield conditioner, it is best to do some preliminary work on the infield. Lightly water the skinned area and then allow some drying (let the water soak into the dirt) time. Next, nail drag (no deeper than ½ inch) the infield arc which will provide some pre-leveling and give the skinned surface a good blend when the infield conditioner is added.

Once you completed the preliminary work, begin the top-dressing procedure. Top-dress the infield, baselines, and mound and homeplate dirt areas. This is done by simply applying a thin layer of infield conditioner, approximately ¼ inch to ½ inch, on the skinned areas. The form in which you purchased your infield conditioner, (either bags or bulk, bulk is usually cheaper and saves money in the long run), the equipment you have on hand, and the manpower at your disposal, will determine to some extent how you apply the material. Again, there are several ideas on how to go about it, here are some of the most common: a top-dressing machine, a front-end loader, wheelbarrows, or by hand from bags. Once the material has been placed as evenly as possible on the skinned surface, it should be leveled with either a flat board (example: nail drag turned over on its flat side), a screen drag





Things to remember

Pitcher's Mound, Homeplate, and Baselines

All of these areas should be top-dressed with $\frac{1}{4}$ inch of infield conditioner. These areas should NOT be tilled unless you are adding clay and building them up. You want your pitcher's mound, homeplate, and baselines to be firm, allowing excess water from rain to run off due to its natural slope. Water these areas after games and practices, keeping them moist. Use tarps on your pitcher's mound, homeplate and even bullpens every day and night when they are not in use. This will keep the moisture in the clay to allow for better play, wear and tear.

- Tarps
- Fill pitching/batter's boxes holes daily with a good mound clay
- Moisture / Water!

Excess Rain

Infield conditioners eliminate a great portion of maintenance that would be required on the infield after a heavy or long rain. It is important to stay off the infield, and let the conditioner and Mother Nature do the work for you. If you do get such weather conditions, take a good look at your infield so that you will see whether you have high and low areas needing to be leveled. Depending on the area and the depth of a high or low spot, a deeper larger area usually requires adding infield mix, or if the area is not so deep, simply add some more conditioner. More damage than good is done to an infield by getting on it to soon after a heavy or long rain. If the sun is out and/or the wind is blowing and it's before a game or practice, let the field dry naturally for as long as possible. When the field is dry enough to work on it without causing damage (rutting or clay balls uses a nail drag), nail drag the infield to allow the air to permeate into the dirt. However, do NOT nail drag if there is still a chance of rain because if it does rain more, you will be in worse shape than you were before. If you cannot nail drag but can walk on the infield, LIGHTLY rake open the surface. After nail dragging or lightly raking, let it dry naturally. Let the infield sit as long as possible before a game or practice. Allow yourself just enough time before the game or practice to add infield conditioner or even drying agents (specialized products for drying faster than normal infield conditioners) if needed, and then finish drag (screen or mat) the infield. Play ball!

- Let Mother Nature help you
- Check your infield every time it rains
- Lightly rake, NO clay balling
- Add conditioner when needed, NO bald spots





with a leveling bar, or with good old fashion rakes. After leveling, finish drag (screen or mat drag) the infield and then water again. The infield should now be ready for safe play.

The second way to top dress and incorporate infield conditioners involves tilling the infield conditioner into the infield arc, followed by the previously detailed top-dressing. Before applying the layer of infield conditioner to be incorporated, lightly water the infield. Some groundskeepers/coaches will nail drag or roto-till the infield before placing the conditioner to re-mix or re-level the infield mix (dirt portion of the infield that is made up of a combination of sand, silt, and clay). Be advised tilling the infield too deep, or overworking it with a nail drag, will make it much harder to apply the conditioner because the skinned area will be too loose. If you have overworked the infield or tilled it too deep, it is going to take more time and effort to get it level and compacted. After prepping, apply ¼ inch to 1 inch of infield conditioner to the skinned area as evenly as possible. This can be done by one of the afore mentioned methods in the top-dressing process. The depth of conditioner will depend on how deep you roto-till or nail drag the infield. For example if you were applying [Diamond Pro's Red Infield Conditioner](#), it recommends the application of a ¼ inch of conditioner per inch of infield dirt that is tilled or worked. Therefore, if you

were going to roto-till 2 inches deep, you would apply ½ inch of conditioner. After you place the conditioner, roto-till or nail drag the infield to incorporate the conditioner with the existing infield mix. Level it with either with a box blade, a flat board (example: nail drag turned over on its flat side), or with good leveling rakes. At this point you should have a fairly loose surface that needs to be compacted and leveled. Either rent a small roller or use some compacting/leveling device or machine to compact and level the infield to your or your player's preferences. Some groundskeepers/coaches prefer a fast, firm surface, while others prefer a bit slower, looser playing surface. Ideally, your players should be able to play on the infield without slipping and or cutting, thus creating ruts or sliding and creating deep holes. The real test of course, is when a ball is thrown or hit; the infield should provide a true and even hop or roll. Bad hops are players', coaches', and groundskeepers' nightmare. After compacting and leveling the infield, apply a top-dressing application as previously mentioned for a smooth, finished playing surface.

To summarize, be sure to find good, clean, quality materials for both your infield mix and infield conditioner(s). Don't be afraid to experiment and make mistakes, but ask questions along the way. Remember groundskeeping is an art, not a science. Play ball on a safe infield!

Things to remember

Skinned Infield Tips

Infield conditioners will simplify your infield maintenance. After playing a game or practicing on the infield, screen drag the infield level, always remove the bases in order to NOT create any low or high areas. When dragging stay at least 1 foot from the edge of the grass in order to NOT create build-up on the edge, also known as lips. Water the skinned area, this allows the infield to retain some moisture, thus improving the workability and playability. Keep your dirt underneath your top layer moist and do not allow it to dry out, crack and become too hard. If your infield is getting to firm, use water and / or a nail drag to loosen up the playing surface. Nail dragging should be done at least once a week, sometimes more, depending on the weather and condition of your infield.

- Buy quality clay, infield mix, and infield conditioners
- 90% of the game is played on the infield dirt
- 7 of the 10 (includes the batter, does not include 3 potential base runners) players, play on the skinned area
- Moisture / Water!

