



Artificial Turf 101

Basics for Buying and Installing Your New Turf Field

Let's discuss why people install artificial turf fields. I think most people will agree that there is no substitute for the perfectly built and maintained natural turf field. The color and feel of the perfect, real, grass blades, the fragrance of freshly cut turf, the overall aesthetics and the decreased danger during a fall are some of the reasons why properly maintained natural turf is superior to artificial turf.

But let's be realistic, fields that are as perfect as just described, probably only exist for the LA Dodgers, Florida State University, The Miami Dolphins and a few fortunate others! In addition, those entities all have agronomists or even agronomy departments, to ensure that their field is as perfectly maintained as possible every single day. In the case of FSU or some other high profile football programs, the field may only be used 6 or 7 days out of 365.

This is not the real world for the majority of us! Most of us need a facility that we can use from sunrise to sundown, 7 days week and in many cases, for night time play as well. The field needs to perform, be durable and most importantly be safe and with minimal maintenance. Ready for play day- in and day-out! Welcome to the world of the latest generation of artificial turf products for sports fields! Let's get started.

Planning and Design - Once you have decided on the site, whether a new site or the existing football/soccer field inside of your running track, you will want to hire a good designer that has **significant experience with artificial turf fields. This is key! The best way to do this is to contact the American Sports Builder's Association (ASBA)**, sportsbuilders.org or a local ASBA Certified Field Builder (CFB) who can point you to a qualified designer.

This is important for many obvious reasons however, one reason not so obvious is that *all* of this type of work has a “stormwater management component” and that can significantly increase the cost of your project depending on the local stormwater management authority’s requirements.

More specifically, governments and authorities no longer want storm water simply dumped into our streams, rivers, etc. There is a specific science on how to retain stormwater on your site so that there is as minimal an effect on the world outside your site, as possible. This component can be costly, but I think we can all agree, it is a necessary step in protecting our treasured environment for generations to come!

In addition, and depending on your needs, you will also need an experienced designer to help you sort through all of the other options for your new facility. Should you upgrade your running track while taking on this project? If so, what orientation should I use for the field events? Do I need a slot or trench drain? Should I build new bleachers? Do I need new lighting? The list goes on and on, however an ASBA, CFB can help you with your initial thoughts and then point you to a qualified designer. This may be the most important step for your dream project, **so choose carefully!**

Artificial Turf Manufacturers – One of the first things you will decide with your designer is, how will we decide on the best turf product for our needs? Some of the most important criteria will be:

- 1) How long has the manufacturer been successfully manufacturing and installing turf?
- 2) How stable is the company and what does their balance sheet look like?
- 3) Is their product American made and free from contaminants?
- 4) What infill options do they offer?
- 5) Do they offer an independent 3rd party warranty by a highly rated company?
- 6) What different options or level products do they offer?

Obviously, as your designer will be experienced, he will probably have some ideas and favorites on what he/she thinks is the best fit for you. Regardless, there are two typical strategies for choosing your turf product. One way is to decide on a few manufacturer’s names and products you think you like, have them come to you for a presentation and then name your favorite product as the standard or sole source product when going out for “Request for Proposal” (RFP) or bid.

A second popular way and one that will encourage more competitive pricing, is to go through the same process except, choose a performance specification as the minimum standard, choose your top 3-5 products and have them bid individually to the bidder as an add- on to the base bid site work. This should theoretically **give you a buffet of choices and at the most competitive prices**. Remember, you should make it clear, you will not be bound by low price. You may decide one turf product, although higher priced than another, may still be the best value! On publicly bid projects, you will need to perform a **thorough investigation** with your experts to see how this can be done within the local legal structure.

In-Fill Material – One last item you will need to address is the **in-fill material**, used to create the ballast to keep the turf in place and provide for the appropriate cushioning effect or minimum **GMAX**

that will be required for your field to be usable and within requirements. Typical in-fill is made up of reclaimed/recycled tire granules with or without a sand component. This has been by far the most popular choice on the thousands of fields already installed in North America.

But as you may or may not know, the recycled tire product has been under attack for many years, because of potential lead issues. To our knowledge, no conclusive evidence has been proven against the use of tire granules, and most fields are still installed in this traditional way. That being said, there are a growing number of consumers that are looking at other options such as using virgin rubber or even “eco-friendly” infills that use natural ingredients such as coconut strands, cork and other ingredients. These have become viable options however, they are potentially much more expensive and the verdict is still out on what the maintenance cost might be for the duration of the installation.

In closing, there are enough good artificial turf products and options available for every owner that will perform as you wish, be properly durable and most importantly be safe! **Find yourself a CFB and a successful, experienced designer so that your “Field of Dreams” is a guaranteed success!**

The author of this opinion document is Bill Narozanick, President and Owner of American Athletic Track and Turf in Vincentown, NJ and Haines City, FL. He has been a member of the ASBA since 1986 and is a Certified Track Builder as awarded by the ASBA. Bill has been building high quality sports facilities for 45 years and in his own business since 1982. Bill has been involved with track and field construction during that entire period of time and in setting the highest standards for laser control technology relating to the sports construction industry. In addition, Bill is a proud graduate and Varsity Letterman (track and field) of Florida State University where he experienced some of the finest facilities in the Southeast. That experience honed his joy and passion for the sports construction industry and he brings that same joy and passion and extensive experience to help owners, taxpayers, fundraisers, kids and competitors decide the appropriate facilities and surfaces for their programs.