

## **BMP C125: Topsoiling**

### ***Purpose***

To provide a suitable growth medium for final site stabilization with vegetation. While not a permanent cover practice in itself, topsoiling is an integral component of providing permanent cover in those areas where there is an unsuitable soil surface for plant growth. Native soils and disturbed soils that have been organically amended not only retain much more stormwater, but they also serve as effective biofilters for urban pollutants and, by supporting more vigorous plant growth, reduce the water, fertilizer and pesticides needed to support installed landscapes. Topsoil does not include any subsoils but only the material from the top several inches including organic debris.

### ***Conditions of Use***

- Native soils should be left undisturbed to the maximum extent practicable. Native soils disturbed during clearing and grading should be restored, to the maximum extent practicable, to a condition where moisture-holding capacity is equal to or better than the original site conditions. This criterion can be met by using on-site native topsoil, incorporating amendments into on-site soil, or importing blended topsoil.
- Topsoiling is a required procedure when establishing vegetation on shallow soils, and soils of critically low pH (high acid) levels.
- Stripping of existing, properly functioning soil system and vegetation for the purpose of topsoiling during construction is not acceptable. If an existing soil system is functioning properly it shall be preserved in its undisturbed and uncompacted condition.
- Depending on where the topsoil comes from, or what vegetation was on site before disturbance, invasive plant seeds may be included and could cause problems for establishing native plants, landscaped areas, or grasses.
- Topsoil from the site will contain mycorrhizal bacteria that are necessary for healthy root growth and nutrient transfer. These native mycorrhiza are acclimated to the site and will provide optimum conditions for establishing grasses. Commercially available mycorrhiza products should be used when topsoil is brought in from off-site.

### ***Design and Installation Specifications***

If topsoiling is to be done, the following items should be considered:

- Maximize the depth of the topsoil wherever possible to provide the maximum possible infiltration capacity and beneficial growth medium. Topsoil depth shall be at least 8 inches with a minimum organic content of 10 percent dry weight and pH between 6.0 and 8.0 or matching the pH of the undisturbed soil. This can be accomplished either by returning native topsoil to the site and/or incorporating organic amendments. Organic amendments should be incorporated to a minimum 8-inch depth except where tree roots or other natural

features limit the depth of incorporation. Subsoils below the 12-inch depth should be scarified at least 2 inches to avoid stratified layers, where feasible. The decision to either layer topsoil over a subgrade or incorporate topsoil into the underlying layer may vary depending on the planting specified.

- If blended topsoil is imported, then fines should be limited to 25 percent passing through a 200 sieve.
- The final composition and construction of the soil system will result in a natural selection or favoring of certain plant species over time. For example, recent practices have shown that incorporation of topsoil may favor grasses, while layering with mildly acidic, high-carbon amendments may favor more woody vegetation.
- Locate the topsoil stockpile so that it meets specifications and does not interfere with work on the site. It may be possible to locate more than one pile in proximity to areas where topsoil will be used.
- Allow sufficient time in scheduling for topsoil to be spread prior to seeding, sodding, or planting.
- Care must be taken not to apply to subsoil if the two soils have contrasting textures. Sandy topsoil over clayey subsoil is a particularly poor combination, as water creeps along the junction between the soil layers and causes the topsoil to slough.
- If topsoil and subsoil are not properly bonded, water will not infiltrate the soil profile evenly and it will be difficult to establish vegetation. The best method to prevent a lack of bonding is to actually work the topsoil into the layer below for a depth of at least 6 inches.
- Ripping or re-structuring the subgrade may also provide additional benefits regarding the overall infiltration and interflow dynamics of the soil system.
- Field exploration of the site shall be made to determine if there is surface soil of sufficient quantity and quality to justify stripping. Topsoil shall be friable and loamy (loam, sandy loam, silt loam, sandy clay loam, clay loam). Areas of natural ground water recharge should be avoided.
- Stripping shall be confined to the immediate construction area. A 4- to 6- inch stripping depth is common, but depth may vary depending on the particular soil. All surface runoff control structures shall be in place prior to stripping.

Stockpiling of topsoil shall occur in the following manner:

- Side slopes of the stockpile shall not exceed 2:1.
- An interceptor dike with gravel outlet and silt fence shall surround all topsoil stockpiles between October 1 and April 30. Between May 1

and September 30, an interceptor dike with gravel outlet and silt fence shall be installed if the stockpile will remain in place for a longer period of time than active construction grading.

- Erosion control seeding or covering with clear plastic or other mulching materials of stockpiles shall be completed within 2 days (October 1 through April 30) or 7 days (May 1 through September 30) of the formation of the stockpile. Native topsoil stockpiles shall not be covered with plastic.
- Topsoil shall not be placed while in a frozen or muddy condition, when the subgrade is excessively wet, or when conditions exist that may otherwise be detrimental to proper grading or proposed sodding or seeding.
- Previously established grades on the areas to be topsoiled shall be maintained according to the approved plan.
- When native topsoil is to be stockpiled and reused the following should apply to ensure that the mycorrhizal bacterial, earthworms, and other beneficial organisms will not be destroyed:
  1. Topsoil is to be re-installed within 4 to 6 weeks;
  2. Topsoil is not to become saturated with water;
  3. Plastic cover is not allowed.
- Inspect stockpiles regularly, especially after large storm events. Stabilize any areas that have eroded.

***Maintenance  
Standards***