



Infield Mix For Baseball & Softball Fields

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There are two options for a baseball/softball infield mix. One is having a sand/clay/silt mixed product and the other is a crushed limestone product. The first is much more labor intensive and is used mainly by major league baseball and other higher maintained fields. The second product works very well for lower budget fields and is a good alternative. The main objective is to have a material that is firm, but doesn't hold too much water causing wet playing conditions.

As I said, a clay based infield mix is much trickier to maintain and has some special considerations, but it usually is an excellent playing surface. The main consideration for a clay based field is the ratio of the three soil types – sand, clay and silt. If you have a field that receives a lot of play and rain can be an issue, you'll want to have the percentage of sand between 60 and 70, and the percentage of clay/silt at 30 to 40. If you have very little rain, infrequent play, or an excellent tarp system, the ratio of clay can be increased, which give you a firmer surface. However, you always have to keep in mind percolation rates. Ideally, you infield will have a drainage system with a sand/gravel mix under your infield mix.

The second option for an infield mix is ag-lime, which is a crushed red limestone. The key for maintaining this product is water management. It tends to dry out and be dusty if the field doesn't get enough water. It can play quite well and recovers quickly from a rainstorm without the use of tarps. My local source for this material is Bryan Red Rock out of Shakopee, MN.

Percolation is key for the mix you chose, although your main drainage should always be from surface run off. An easy way to test different infield mixes is to fill two 8 oz. plastic cups that have 4-5 1/8" holes in the bottom with your different mixes. Fill each ¾ full with water and let the water drain away. See how long before each mix becomes firm

by pressing your finger into the mix. The faster one can be played on sooner. This is a simple, but important test to compare different samples.

Another step you'll want to do is to make sure there aren't any large rocks in your mix, which can affect play. By passing your mix through a 3/8" screen you can get all the larger particles out and save yourself from dealing with it later when it's much harder to get them out.

Once your infield mix has been chosen, many grounds managers will fine tune their mix by adding a conditioner – usually calcined clay. This works best mixed into the top 2" and helps resist compaction and increases the water holding capacity.

Whatever mix you chose it's important to test the percolation rate, screen out the rocks, and make sure you have adequate slope (about a 2" drop from your infield grass to your outfield grass) because your skinned area should shed water, not drain it.