STANDARD FOR TOPSOILING

Definition

Topsoiling entails the distribution of suitable quality soil on areas to be vegetated.

Purpose

To improve the soil medium for plant establishment and maintenance.

Water Quality Enhancement

Growth and establishment of a vigorous vegetative cover is facilitated by topsoil, preventing soil loss by wind and rain offsite and into streams and other stormwater conveyances.

Where Applicable

Topsoil shall be used where soils are to be disturbed and will be revegetated.

Methods and Materials

1. Materials

   A. Topsoil should be friable[1], loamy[2], free of debris, objectionable weeds and stones, and contain no toxic substance or adverse chemical or physical condition that may be harmful to plant growth. Soluble salts should not be excessive (conductivity less than 0.5 millimhos per centimeter. More than 0.5 millimhos may desiccate seedlings and adversely impact growth). Imported topsoil shall have a minimum organic matter content of 2.75 percent. Organic matter content may be raised by additives.

   B. Topsoil substitute is a soil material which may have been amended with sand, silt, clay, organic matter, fertilizer or lime and has the appearance of topsoil. Topsoil substitutes may be utilized on sites with insufficient topsoil for establishing permanent vegetation. All topsoil substitute materials shall meet the requirements of topsoil noted above. Soil tests shall be performed to determine the components of sand, silt, clay, organic matter, soluble salts and pH level.

2. Stripping and Stockpiling

   A. Field exploration should be made to determine whether quantity and or quality of surface soil justifies stripping.

   B. Stripping shall be confined to the immediate construction area.

   C. Where feasible, lime may be applied before stripping at a rate determined by soil tests to bring the soil pH to approximately 6.5.

[1]Friable means easily crumbles in the fingers, as defined in most soils texts.

[2]Loamy means texture groups consisting of coarse loamy sands, sandy loam, fine and very fine sandy loam, loam, silt loam, clay loam, sandy clay loam and silty clay loam textures and having less than 35% coarse fragments (particles less than 2mm in size) as defined in the Glossary of Soil Science Terms, 1996, Soil Science Society of America.

D. A 4-6 inch stripping depth is common, but may vary depending on the particular soil.

E. Stockpiles of topsoil should be situated so as not to obstruct natural drainage or cause off-site environmental damage.

F. Stockpiles should be vegetated in accordance with standards previously described herein; see standards for Permanent (pg. 4-1) or Temporary (pg.7-1) Vegetative Cover for Soil Stabilization. Weeds should not be allowed to grow on stockpiles.

3. Site Preparation

A. Grade at the onset of the optimal seeding period so as to minimize the duration and area of exposure of disturbed soil to erosion. Immediately proceed to establish vegetative cover in accordance with the specified seed mixture. Time is of the essence

B. Grade as needed and feasible to permit the use of conventional equipment for seedbed preparation, seeding, mulch application and anchoring, and maintenance.
See the Standard for Land Grading, pg. 19-1.

C. As guidance for ideal conditions, subsoil should be tested for lime requirement. Limestone, if needed, should be applied to bring soil to a pH of approximately 6.5 and incorporated into the soil as nearly as practical to a depth of 4 inches.

D. Prior to topsoiling, the subsoil shall be in compliance with the Standard for Land Grading, pg. 19-1.

E. Employ needed erosion control practices such as diversions, grade stabilization structures, channel stabilization measures, sedimentation basins, and waterways. See Standards 11 through 42.

4. Applying Topsoil

A. Topsoil should be handled only when it is dry enough to work without damaging soil structure; i.e., less than field capacity (see glossary).

B. A uniform application to an average depth of 5.0 inches, minimum of 4 inches, firmed in place is required. Alternative depths may be considered where special regulatory and/or industry design standards are appropriate such as on golf courses, sports fields, landfill capping, etc.. Soils with a pH of 4.0 or less or containing iron sulfide shall be covered with a minimum depth of 12 inches of soil having a pH of 5.0 or more, in accordance with the Standard for Management of High Acid Producing Soil (pg. 1-1).

C. Pursuant to the requirements in Section 7 of the Standard for Permanent Vegetative Stabilization, the contractor is responsible to ensure that permanent vegetative cover becomes established on at least 80% of the soils to be stabilized with vegetation. Failure to achieve the minimum coverage may require additional work to be performed by the contractor to include some or all of the following: supplemental seeding, re-application of lime and fertilizers, and/or the addition of organic matter (i.e. compost) as a top dressing. Such additional measures shall be based on soil tests such as those offered by Rutgers Cooperative Extension Service or other approved laboratory facilities qualified to test soil samples for agronomic properties.