

# Prepping For The Real Thing

It's one thing to practice short- and soft-field landings on your home drome's 5000-foot-long paved runway, but it's quite another to be landing on such surfaces for keeps. Preparation is key, and here are some tips to get you started.

## KNOW WHERE YOU ARE GOING

Perhaps the single most important element of soft field technique is to have a plan before you touch down. Most airplanes only go forward, so you need to know how you are going to get to the magical stopping place, parked on firm ground and facing the direction you want to go when you are ready to leave.

If landing on a potentially soft field, keep full back pressure on the yoke or stick, and be prepared to add power and speed when you touch down. You want to float until you can confirm the field is not too soft. If you feel the field pull you down on touch down, or you feel the plane starting to sink, even a hint of forward pressure can cause an abrupt nose over.

Once you have a confirmed landing, keep the plane rolling while you make sure you know exactly where to park. You may only have one chance to execute the taxi-to-parking maneuver cleanly. If the field has both soft and firm patches, and the opportunity arises, stop on firm ground so you can plan your path to the next firm destination.

## DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Unpaved short and soft fields are often prone to novelties not generally associated with 10,000 feet of concrete. They may have constrained or limited approaches with obstacles, or rough surfaces, gopher holes, large rocks or tall grass that can obscure something nefarious.

Before landing, take the time to scout obstacles on the field. (Minam River Lodge in Oregon is a beautiful field in a narrow canyon with a constrained approach, which used to have a horse known as Speed Bump, who preferred the short runway grass to the taller grass in the adjacent pasture.) A nearby field was Red's Horse Ranch, another nice grass airstrip, which has ditches on either side of the runway, usually obscured by tall grass.

Often fields with novel issues like soft spots in the spring and ditches will appear in pilot reports at various Web sites like [shortfield.com](http://shortfield.com) or the Idaho Aviation Association's airstrip network, at [www.idahoaviation.com](http://www.idahoaviation.com). If you are going into a short field or soft field, it pays to know what to expect.

