

### **Ground Maintenance Hints - January**

Not a lot to do this month. Basically keep off the square if very wet or frosty. During mild conditions, brush square as often as possible to remove dew, this will disperse any fungal spores present and worm casts. Continually inspect for disease and damage on the square.

Make sure the machinery has been serviced. If not, do it NOW, as next month preparations for the coming season could begin, if weather conditions allow. Check the Pavilion for burst pipes after any cold weather.

## **Ground Maintenance Tips - February**

This month, continuing brushing square as often as possible. At this time of year, on some cricket squares, the grass starts to lose its colour, taking on a yellowing effect.

This can be overcome by a light application of autumn/winter fertiliser, preferably with a content of Iron and this will soon bring the colour back and harden the grass plans for the spring rolling regime, which should commence shortly.

If the weather is mild and the grass is growing, start mowing to keep the growth under control. Maintain the square at a height of no more than 1 inch (2.5 cm), initially, but gradually reduce the height to  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch, but before any mowing inspect the square for worm casts and if there are any present be sure to disperse them prior to cutting.

If there is excessive worm activity on your square, consider having the square treated to overcome the problem, but any remedial action should be carried out by a Qualified Operator.

A light scarification of the square is a good idea at this time of year to remove any dead fibre and moss, but do not disturb the surface of the soil. Remove all debris from the square and if the scarifier does not have a box attachment, collect it with a mower.

At the end of the month, if conditions allow, rolling should commence, starting with a light roller or the mower with the blades disconnected. At this stage roll diagonally and across the line of play only.

Always remember that prior to any mowing or rolling, disperse any worm casts, otherwise bare patches are created which become ideal breeding ground for disease and weeds.

### **Ground Maintenance Hints - March**

If due to wet conditions, no rolling could be carried out in February, begin the rolling regime now. Commence with a light roller or heavy mower with the blades disconnected, and initially across the line of play and diagonally only. Gradually increase the weight of the roller over the next few weeks to begin consolidating the surface.

Continue regular cutting at the winter height gradually reducing to  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch by the end of the month.

If an application of Autumn/Winter fertiliser has not yet been applied, do it out now.

If there are any bare areas on the square especially at pitch ends that have not fully recovered after the autumn renovation, reseeded and level in an attempt to increase the grass coverage. Use germination sheets or Hessian sheeting to cover the newly sown areas, to assist in the germination process.

Mowing the outfield should commence as soon as conditions permit, initially, just topping the grass at approximately 1 inch and then gradually lowering the height to as low as the contours of the field will allow for the start of the season.

## **Ground Maintenance Tips - April**

The rolling regime should be at the stage when the heavy roller is being used. Continue rolling in all directions except for in the line of play until the time arrives to prepare the pitch for the first match.

When rolling during pitch preparation, roll only in the direction of line of play and keep rolling in only in this direction for the remainder of the season.

Lightly scarify the square being careful not to disturb the surface. This is to lift any lateral grasses and thatch accumulated over the winter months. Cut the square to remove any debris. A light scarification of the square should be carried out at least once a month during the playing season.

By the end of the month consider a weed and feed programme. If there are excessive weeds present, the entire square should be treated with a selective weed killer and by an authorised operator.

If there are only a few weeds present these can be treated individually with a proprietary selective weed gun spray. At this time apply a Spring and Summer fertiliser as per the manufacturers instructions.

During the month the cricket table should be squared off and mark out the positions of each pitch on the square and identify where the centre stumps will be situated.

Thoughts should now be on preparation of the first pitch of the season. This should commence ideally about 10 days before the game, but if this is not possible, certainly not less than 5 days. Firstly scarify the pitch by raking and/or brushing, without disturbing the surface, to lift the grasses and gradually reduce the height of cut to the desired length for the match to be played on.

Be careful not to cut too short so that the mower blades scalp the surface. If the pre-season rolling has been carried out correctly, the pitch should only need rolling for one half to an hour every other day up to and the morning of the match.

Maintain the height of the grass on the square at approx  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch throughout the season, but some times depending on the growth it may require two cuts a week.

### **Grounds Maintenance Hints - May**

The rolling regime should continue from April. Use the heavy roller as much as possible, rolling in all directions when the surface is dry. If bad weather means that the first game is played before all the heavy rolling has been completed, then continue rolling during normal during pitch preparation, but now only in the line of play.

If the weed and feed programme suggested for April could also not be carried out, then complete it in early May.

Once cricket has started, the pitches must be repaired as soon as possible after the game. Firstly brush the bowler's foot holes until the holes are clean, brush the remainder of the pitch and cut the entire pitch to remove all debris. Then moisten the foot holes, remove any surplus water with a brush or by hand. Place enough loam to fill the holes together with a handful of seed into a bucket and thoroughly mix the two together. Add a little water, just enough moisture to produce a ball when the mixture is grasped tightly in the hand. Fill the foot holes with the mixture and firm down really hard with a mallet or stomper until the surface is level. You could then sprinkle some grass clippings over the area, this not only helps the binding process but also gives a better finish to the repair. A useful tip to assist the germination of the seed when repairing a pitch, is to put the moist mixture of loam and seed in a black bag and tie the opening to make it air tight. This will start the germination process in the bag and when the mixture is used to repair the pitch ends, the new grass should start to appear in about seven days.

If the repaired pitch is firm and not badly damaged, roll several times with the heavy roller, then the pitch could be used again for the next game.

## **Ground Maintenance Tips - June**

Brush the square as often as possible especially on mild and dewy mornings, this will disperse any fungal spores present and discourage turf diseases.

During the month look for signs of under nourishment on the square and treat as necessary with a Spring/Summer fertiliser with no more than 8% nitrogen content during the playing season. Avoid applying to pitches that are under preparation to prevent the risk of scorching the grass, and make sure it is well watered in or rain is imminent.

If there has been excessive rainfall, be mindful to check for diseases and in particular Red Thread. If present this can usually be eradicated by an application of Nitrogen based fertiliser, such as any Spring/Summer product. If the problem persists the area may need to be treated by an appropriate Fungicide applied by a qualified operator.

Continue to cut the square as growth requires and remember not too short approx ½ inch. This is best carried out on a Monday to remove all debris created by the weekend games, and also on a Friday to give the square a professional finish before Saturdays match. Also at least twice a month lightly scarify all unused pitches prior to cutting to lift and remove lateral grass growth to eliminate crowning.

Pitches that have been used and will not be required again or at least until late season, should be watered and then pricked with a sarel or similar spiked roller to prick the surface thoroughly and use to break up the surface of the ends to create a seedbed. Apply seed liberally to the whole pitch and especially to the ends and brush the seed into holes created by the roller, lightly top dress with loam and ensure that the levels are correct especially at the ends by using a levelling tool.

If possible cover the entire pitch with a germination sheet, if this is not available then at least cover the ends with Hessian or such material that will allow moisture through and not dry the surface out. Water the area daily preferably in the cool of the evening, leave the sheets on for as long as possible and new grass shoots should appear in about seven days. For pitches to be used again shortly then repair as outlined in May section.

Continue to look out for weeds and treat them individually as necessary with a suitable proprietary spot weed aerosol or similar applicator. If the weather is going through a dry spell, ensure that pitches are watered well during pitch preparation. The amount of water and the timing will of course depend on local conditions and soil strengths.

## **Ground Maintenance Tips - July**

During the month apply a Spring/Summer fertiliser with no more than 8% nitrogen content. Avoid applying to pitches that are in a state of preparation for matches to avoid the risk of scorching the grass, and make sure that it is well watered in or when rain is imminent.

Continue to cut square as growth requires and remember not too short. Pitches that have been used and will not be required again or at least until late season, should be spiked with a sarel roller or similar spiked roller to prick the surface thoroughly and use to break up the surface of the ends to make a seed bed. Apply seed liberally to the ends and the whole pitch, brush the seed into the holes made by the roller, lightly top dress with loam and cover the whole pitch, if possible, with a germination sheet. If this is not available, then at least cover the ends with Hessian or such material that will allow moisture through and not dry the surface out. If dry, water the area daily, preferably in the evening when temperature is cooler.

For pitches to be used again shortly, then repair as explained in May section. Continually look out for weeds and treat them individually as necessary.

The end of the season is approaching, so start thinking about Autumn renovation, how much loam, seed and fertiliser to order remembering that you will need approx 3-4 kilos of seed per pitch on your square for reseedling. Do you own a scarifier or suitable spiker? If not, where can you hire them? These questions are worth thinking about now and not to leave to the last minute.

### **Ground Maintenance Tips - August**

Continue to repair pitches as described in July program. Be mindful that, this time of the year, your cricket square will require copious watering, to avoid grass plant stress, which occurs when water loss from the leaves exceeds the rate of water intake through the roots. During pitch preparation ensure that the moisture penetrates well into the soil prior to any rolling.

It is important to prepare and organise in advance of the autumn renovation programme. The correct Loam must be ordered bearing in mind that for Club standard pitches, a minimum of 25-30% of clay is required, ask your supplier about this. Seed needs to be ordered, preferably a 100% dwarf ryegrass mixture and the amount you will require is approx 3-4 kilos per pitch or even 5 if the grass coverage this season was poor. At the same time order a supply of Autumn/Winter fertiliser - at least one bag for autumn renovation and perhaps two more for applications during the winter months.

If the Club doesn't own a scarifying machine or vertical action spiker, make enquiries now from Hire companies, other Cricket Clubs or Golf Clubs as to their availability, as these machines are required to do the job properly and they will be in great demand.

## **Ground Maintenance Tips - September**

As soon as the season is completed the most essential work on the square must be carried out before the cold nights set in to ensure a good surface to start next season with.

Firstly, cut the entire square as short as possible without scalping the surface. The ideal height is the same height as a prepared pitch. Thoroughly scarify the square as often as necessary, to remove all thatch present. The first passes should be in the line of play and any further passes should be at a slight angle to the first run. Do not scarify at right angles to the first passes as this could create small squares that may dry and break up during next season. Use the collecting box on the scarifying machine to collect most of the debris and then finish off with brush attachment if available. If a box or brush is not available then used a boxed mower to collect as much debris as possible.

Next aerate the square with a vertical action spiker ideally with 4 inch long and  $\frac{1}{2}$  thick tines at 2-inch centres to relieve compaction caused by rolling. For this operation ensure that the ground is soft enough for the tines to enter the soil without lifting the surface. If it is difficult for the tine to reach the full depth then extra aeration can be carried out at a later date.

The next operation is over-seeding. To do this thoroughly, prick the surface of the square with a sarel roller, or similar spiked roller, to create a mass of shallow holes. Over-sow with a 100% dwarf ryegrass seed mixture at a rate of 4 to 5 kg per pitch. Brush the square in all directions to ensure that the seed drops into the holes provide earlier.

Apply an Autumn/Winter fertiliser that is low in Nitrogen and higher in Phosphate and Potash at the rate as recommended by the manufacturer.

Now the top dressing should be applied. The clay content in the dressing should depend on the standard of cricket played on the pitch. At club level the minimum of clay required is 25% rising to at least 28% for top club cricket. The top dressing must be dry when applied and well worked into the surface with a drag mat or large brush.

If the square is uneven, a method to create better levels is to use a large lute or aluminium ladder and drag it across the line of play. This operation will highlight the low areas where extra dressing can be applied.

### **Ground Maintenance Tips - October**

If the end of season work was carried out in September, by the middle of October there should be a good showing of new grasses.

If there are some weak areas on the square, over seed these areas to ensure good grass cover for next year.

When the new grass has attained the height of approximately 1½ inches, tip the grass with preferably a rotary mower with a collection box and reduce the height to 1 inch. If possible, retain this height throughout the winter.

If deep aeration has not been completed, carry it out by the end of this month or the beginning of November, when there is sufficient moisture in the soil to ensure maximum penetration. Remember that the aeration should be carried out with vertical action spiker with 4-inch long pencil tines at 2-inch centres.

If there is excessive worm activity on the square, treat immediately, otherwise the casts will create a muddy mess which are breeding grounds for disease and weeds. This operation should be carried out by a qualified person.

Throughout the winter months, the square should be brushed as often as possible to disperse any worm casts and fungal spores if present. If there is sign of disease at any time then this should be treated by a qualified operator immediately.

Now is a good time to ensure that the sightscreens are securely put away to avoid damage from the winter winds, and start looking at the machinery for routine maintenance.

### **Ground Maintenance Hints - November**

If very wet weather has prevented able the autumn renovation programme, then it is too late and the work will need to be carried out in the spring.

If the square is very wet or frosty the best advice is keep off. During this month deep aeration can be carried out if conditions allow and you should use a spiker with a vertical action and 4-inch pencil tines at 2-inch centres.

Continue to brush or switch the square when possible to disperse any fungal spores present to reduce the risk of disease this will also remove the dew prior to any mowing. If mowing is possible remember to cut no shorter than 1 inch.

Other jobs for the month, if not already done, is to check sightscreens that they are in a safe position for the winter and grease the wheels. Clean and arrange for all machinery and equipment to be repaired and serviced.

### **Ground Maintenance Hints - December**

Very little to do this month, except to continue brushing the square and if necessary, mowing the square and at no less than 1-inch. But if the square is too wet or frosty, then keep off.

Arrange for machinery to be repaired and serviced if not already done so.