



**GROUNDS
MANAGEMENT
ASSOCIATION**

WINTER SQUARE AND OUTFIELD MAINTENANCE BEST PRACTICE

Berkshire Cricket Foundation
Monday 10th November 2025

Making Sport Possible

@wearetheGMA

thegma.org.uk

RENOVATIONS – HOW DID THEY GO?

- Were they successful?
- What issues did you have?
- Did you make any changes?
- Fraise Mowing or Square re-surfacing?
- Glyphosate?



OFF-SEASON MAINTENANCE TASKS

The days of "putting the square to bed" and forgetting about it are long gone. With mild and wet winters more common, growth is continuing all through the winter months, making the winter maintenance an important factor in keeping both the outfield and square in good condition. The occasional surveillance of the square and outfield will provide the opportunity of investigating any outbreak of fungal disease and enable the detection of any excessive grass growth.

- Brushing
- Regular Mowing
- Aeration
- Pests & diseases
- Fertiliser Applications
- Outfields
- Machinery Maintenance

REMEMBER!

Only carry out any works if ground and climate conditions are suitable.

If the ground is too wet, thawing, or frozen, stay off, you will create more problems by going on it.



BRUSHING

Drag brushing the grass leaf in a few directions over the winter months, will help keep the grass leaf upright, with less chances of disease forming.

- Remove dew to help prevent disease.
- Reduces debris on the surface.
- Stands the grass plant up to keep the base of the plant well oxygenated.
- Can help to reduce algae and moss formation.
- Disperse worm casts.
- Stripe the playing surface



MOWING

During mild spells it is necessary to top the grass to ensure that the sward growth is not weakened in the spring by removing too much growth in a short period of time.

Doing this also maintains your sward density. If you leave grass to grow too long an individual grass plant will start to out compete its neighbour. This is difficult to see happening until you start to cut shorter and realise you have lost plants – wasting the money you spent on seed at renovation time.

- Your initial cuts, when suitable, should be with a pedestrian rotary mower
- Ensure the blade is sharp
- The height of cut should be no more than a third of the leaf removed

MOWING

Any growth over 25mm should be lowered to 18 - 22mm when ground conditions allow mowers to be used and foot-traffic to be carried without damage to surface levels.

Never cut when it is too wet and soft and there is a risk of damage to surface levels – the disadvantages far outweigh any benefit from cutting, however long your grass is!

Before cutting, walk the square to remove any debris or rubbish which may have accumulated to ensure that no damage will be caused to the mower.



AERATION

One of the most important jobs of the winter, often neglected

Benefits of aeration

- Improved drainage
- Improved root depth
- Improved root mass
- Encourages beneficial bacteria that break down organic matter and thatch

The ideal conditions are when you can just get the tines in and out of the ground cleanly, but the machinery is not smearing or rutting the surface. Use common sense. If you aerate in the wrong conditions, at best you will be wasting your time, at worse you will be looking for another square to use for the coming season.



PLANT NUTRITION/FERTILISERS APPLICATIONS

- Different amounts of nutrients are needed at different times so the specific types of fertilisers will vary through the year. You can and should use soil analysis to determine the soil pH (the acidity or alkalinity of a soil, which controls the availability of most nutrients to the plant) and the deficiency or otherwise of certain key nutrients.
- Nitrogen is one of the essential nutrients for grass plants – you will need to apply some nitrogen but applying too much can cause a weak sward because the grass will grow tall and lush, but this will be weak growth in excess. All of which means less wear resistance and more mowing.



PLANT NUTRITION/FERTILISERS APPLICATIONS

- A low nitrogen, low phosphorus but higher in potassium is a typical fertiliser used during the winter months – this helps to prevent diseases forming in lush, damp cold grass that is difficult to cut.
- The potassium helps to strengthen the structure of the plant, this can be helped further with the addition of iron, which when applied as iron-sulphate can also help to control moss growth.
- Often such fertilisers are marketed as ‘Winter Feed’ or similar. If you are in any doubt – speak to your fertiliser supplier and always follow the label recommendations.

PESTS & DISEASES

- Worms
- Leatherjackets/ Chafer Grubs
- Wildlife
- Red thread
- Fusarium
- Fairy Rings



EARTHWORMS

- Worms do a great job – below the surface
- Not all species form casts
- Casts are unsightly and affect ball roll and bounce on sports surfaces
- Especially cricket, tennis and golf
- Clay soils used on cricket squares make them more problematic



WORM SOLUTIONS?

- Early remedies included Mercury and Lead Arsenate
- Chlordane – very effective, up to 6 years on a single application
- Residual nature not liked by authorities
- Carbendazim products – not as effective – 2-3 months – also effective as a fungicide
- License withdrawn in 2017



CHAFER GRUBS & LEATHERJACKETS

- Larvae of the Chafer Beetle and Crane Fly
- Feed on turf roots
- Grass appears stressed and dies off
- Damage caused by birds, usually crows/rooks feeding on the larvae
- Control is difficult but can be achieved using insecticide
- Acelepryn is now licensed in UK – timing of application critical
- Active ingredient – chlorantraniliprole
- Biological Control – using nematodes – also time critical



RED THREAD

- Fungal disease
- Red/pink thread-like mycelia
- Very common in ryegrass swards
- Very likely to see it on your square or outfield
- Indicates a lack of nutrition
- Treated by an application of Nitrogen fertilizer



FUSARIUM

- Another Fungal disease
- Favours mild, damp conditions
- Small orange/brown patches which can spread quickly
- Can be controlled
- Dew dispersal (brushing/switching) helps
- Most fungicides approved for turf use are effective



FAIRY RINGS

- Mycelia grow through the root zone
- Waxy mycelia repel water, causing dry, circular patches
- Type 1 – ring of dead grass, often surrounded by an area of stimulated growth
- Type 2 – Usually, a ring of stimulated grass growth, with or without mushrooms. More common on cricket squares
- Type 3 – Just a ring of mushrooms
- Often seen in soils high in organic matter
- Some control possible with wetting agents



OFF-SEASON OUTFIELD MAINTENANCE

Maintain a grass height of 20-25 mm if the area is a cricket outfield only and above 30 mm if used for winter sport.

- Aerate using solid or slit tines.
- Brush if possible
- Remove leaves from turfgrass areas will help to reduce the worm population.
- The effects of casting worms should be dealt with prior to mowing using either products sold for this purpose and/or via use of a drag mat to disperse casts.



OFF-SEASON OUTFIELD MAINTENANCE

For joint winter sports and cricket sites there are some common maintenance issues such as compaction of soil, uneven surfaces, and bare patches. To address these types of problems some key considerations are:

- Regular quality mowing with well-maintained machinery.
- Chain Harrowing/surface grooming can be beneficial along with the use of Heras fencing
- Weed control to ensure only desirable grasses are present in the sward.
- Moss should be controlled before it becomes a problem. Moss is the symptom of poor growing conditions, not the cause of them, so good cultural practices will help to keep moss out of the sward. If moss does appear then application of iron sulphate will help to control, it.
- Pitch rotation where possible to allow high wear areas time to repair.

MACHINERY MAINTENANCE

Winter is the time to carry out any servicing or repairs to equipment

- Mower cylinders, especially fine turf mowers, will need to be reground and a new bottom blade fitted
- Engine serviced; oil changed etc
- Check cables, drive belts and chains
- If sending away for service, ensure to leave plenty of time. Don't get caught out by an early growth spurt.
- Fuel – In 2021, standard unleaded petrol changed for E5 to E10, doubling the amount of ethanol to 10%
- Can potentially cause problems for small engines
- Better to drain fuel from mowers etc

FURTHER SUPPORT

- Cricket Boards/Foundation
- County Pitch Advisors
- County Grounds Associations
- GMA Cricket Toolkit -
<https://resources.thegma.org.uk/cricket/cricket-home>
- GMA Training -
<https://www.thegma.org.uk/learning/training>
- GMA Membership -
<https://www.thegma.org.uk/membership/>

Any Questions?





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THANK YOU

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