

A GROUNDSMAN'S DIARY

Introduction, by Simon Williamson, Pitch Advisor

The following is a description of the tasks required to maintain cricket pitches throughout the year, on a season by season basis.

The Groundsman's season will begin in the autumn, when preparation for the following year's play actually starts.

Please note that every Groundsman will have their own favoured techniques and approaches, which work for them. These may vary from those outlined below; I can only provide advice based on my own experiences of working in a wide range of Cricket facilities during my career.



1 TASKS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

1.1 FOLLOWING THE CLOSE OF THE CRICKET SEASON:

- Cut square as short as possible, 2mm or less
- Scarify in three directions: 2 diagonal, 1 in direction of play. Judge your depth of scarification depending on fibre layer.
- Use a leaf blower or collection brush to leave a clean surface afterwards
- Mow off again to cut off any standing grass. There should now be a nice clean surface to work with.
- Over-seed with a rivet seeder or a sarol roller. Get as much seed into the holes as possible.
- Top-dress using a good quality top-dressing. Five bags per wicket is about right, but will depend on whether there are any undulations at the crease. Lute into surface. Work level, especially at the ends. Drag-mat in, going against play first, finishing off in direction of play. The wider the drag-mat the better, i.e. the width of a wicket 10 feet.

1.2 AUTUMN AND WINTER MONTHS:

- Once grass is up, give it a top-off to about 18mm
- Feed using a top-quality winter fertiliser
- Keep square topped to 18mm throughout the autumn / winter
- Brush square daily with a drag-brush, weather permitting, varying directions each day. This will stimulate grass growth, and help grass stand upright. Keep an eye out for casting worm activity and diseases in the square.
- About the end of October give a good spike to a depth of about six inches/ 150mm, using needle tines. This is to be done with a VERTICAL spiker, not a drum spiker.

1.3 SPRING:

- About five weeks before start of games, start pre-season rolling. Using a mower, with a bag of loam in mower- box, to give extra weight, go in three directions, NEVER in direction of play. Do this nine times, over a period of days, judging weather conditions and ground moisture. Overlap slightly with the mover each time. (i.e. a total of nine times for each diagonal and across the wicket)
- Brush-up grass at the end of each day to keep the grass upright and healthy, and not pushed into the surface.
- Repeat rolling process described above, using heavier mower or add extra bag of loam to mower box.

- When you judge the square to be firm enough, go on with the unballasted heavy roller. Go against direction of play about eight times, again over a period of days, slowly increasing the weight until you are fully ballasted. The pre-season rolling is now complete, and wicket preparation can commence.
- At this time, I used to look for bare areas in need of reseeding and give the whole square a feed with a spring and summer fertiliser.

1.4 LATE SPRING / SUMMER SEASON:

- Cut the pitch to about 8mm.
- Water until moist down to about 4 inches /100mm.
- Put a flat sheet on at night to keep moisture in.
- Start rolling in the morning- on the FIRST day, do 30 minutes in the morning and thirty minutes in the afternoon. Always brush the grass up after rolling. On subsequent days, do only the morning roll. Reduce rolling times as the pitch becomes drier, until you are happy with the surface.
- Take the grass down to the required height, using a verti-cutter if available.

1.5 POST – MATCH REPAIRS:

- I used to repair the whole pitch after games, going over with a rivet-seeder, top-dressing lightly, and levelling ends. This should bring the pitch back into play for later-on in the season. I understand some groundsmen just repair the ends, which is fine if there is adequate grass cover in the middle.

2. CARE OF THE OUTFIELD:

We understand that the outfield may not be considered a priority where funding is limited. This would be my preferred approach, if finances allow:

2.1 STARTING AT THE END OF THE PLAYING SEASON:

- Cut down outfield to 10mm
- Scarify in as many directions as possible to take out the thatch
- Clean the surface of any debris
- Cut again to 10mm
- If possible, over-seed and top-dress using a 50/50 sandy top-dressing

2.2 DURING THE WINTER:

- Keep the outfield brushed every day
- Keep topped to a height of about 18mm, always boxing-off cuttings.
- I used a tractor-pulled chain-harrow daily to remove dew, stimulate grass growth and knock off worm casts.

2.3 SPRING:

- Gradually reduce the height of cut to approx. 12mm.
- When weather conditions are appropriate, give a feed of spring and summer fertiliser, and, if necessary, weedkiller.
- Keep cutting regularly to keep grass tight.