

Grounds Maintenance Calendar

January

The soil will be too wet and unsuitable for working on the square. Maintain any perimeter fencing as required and keep off the square. Machinery maintenance can be undertaken during this cold, snowy period.

February

Most likely the square will be too wet to carry out much work, however, dragbrushing should be a priority, especially if earthworm activity is significant. A light topping of the sward may be required, especially following the recent mild spell which may have encouraged a perennial ryegrass sward to produce some leaf growth.

Maintain the perimeter fencing if this is erected. Towards the end of the month it might be possible to start rolling, however, this will depend upon soil moisture content. Try and plan wicket usage for the coming season and the sequence of use. This way the centre wickets will be available for use during high profile games if required.

March

Rolling and consolidation of the square should be the priority for this month. Start with a relatively light roller, say 5 cwt, and gradually move up to a medium-heavy, say 30 cwt or so, one by the end of the month. The square should be regularly drag brushed and the height of cut should be reduced to about 18mm or so.

A light scarification may be possible if growth is reasonable, but be careful not to overdo this operation too early in the month. Check for any small undulations in the outfield and top-dress them out. Make sure the square is correctly set out with the corners being at exact right angles.

Now for the real stuff

April

Continue to increase the frequency of mowing throughout the month. Scarification will be increased to remove all the surface debris within the base of the sward. Rolling should be continued to provide a solid base for the playing season.

Additional rolling will be carried out for pitch preparation, however, the fundamental groundwork for the season is carried out prior to the first ball being delivered. Make sure the square is properly 'squared up' with the correct number of wickets being spot marked at the ends. Ensure each wicket is correctly squared.

A spring fertiliser will probably be applied this month, although be careful not to apply too much Nitrogen as the aim is to ensure strong root development and not excessive leaf growth.

May

Scarification of the square and during wicket preparation is an important operation for reducing undesirable thatch and this will help to improve bounce and pace, although wickets will probably still be on the slow side at present as the ground won't have been able to dry out adequately yet.

Wicket preparation will be occurring some 7 to 10 days before a game, with this time period going up to 14 days for top-class cricket.

A spring, mainly nitrogen, fertiliser should have been applied to the square, however, beware of leaching due to the wet weather as this may reduce the anticipated time for the next application.

Early use of the outfield should provide feedback of any slight depressions which may need attention to maintain an even and safe playing surface. Aeration of the outfield can also be considered, before the soil dries out too much.

Scarification, to reduce and control undesirable thatch build-up, is also ideally undertaken now. A light fertiliser (low in nitrogen) application for the outfield can also be given, if needed, especially after any aeration and scarification work.

The end of May is also usually a good time to apply a selective herbicide to the outfield.

June

Use the verticutter and scarifier to continue in thatch removal and prevention of thatch build-up. Weed growth may be a problem due to the weather in May, so consider a selective herbicide application. A light nitrogen fertiliser application may be required towards the end of the month.

Basically though it's making sure the wickets are prepared well in advance and that the wickets are used in the sequence that was planned before the start of the season - or at least fairly close to the sequence.

Immediately a game is finished try and carry out and minor repairs as this may enable the wicket to be used again, straight away - depending upon the level of cricket and the length of the match - or at least provide the groundwork for re-using the wicket later in the season, if need be.

July

Besides the continuing preparation of wickets to meet user demands, the square is typically mown on two occasions per week and the outfield once a week. Wickets that had been used and renovated earlier in the season might be able to be re-used again if they have recovered adequately.

Correct watering to a suitable depth, combined with planned rolling will produce a really consolidated playing wicket with excellent bounce. Be careful not to wet just the surface of the wicket and then roll, otherwise the shallow layer that was watered can crack and crumble when rolled.

If not carried out at the end of June, then July is a good time for a light Nitrogen only fertiliser application to the whole square, as this will help maintain sward strength without encouraging unwanted excessive growth.

Towards the end of the month, some wickets will be coming out of use for the few remaining weeks of the season. A head start on some end of season renovation tasks may be considered.

August

Make sure that you have all your materials in stock, or ordered, for the end of the season renovation in early September, or whenever the last match is played. Wickets will be coming out of use for the season during August, so aeration and scarification can be carried out on these wickets to get a head start on the major renovation work later on.

The ends can be lightly forked over to a depth of 50mm or so to produce a fine seed bed and a suitable grass seed applied. Typically this will be dominated by perennial ryegrass.

The body of the renovated wicket can be scarified, aerated and spiked with a sarel spiked roller and then oversown with a suitable grass seed mixture. The mixture content will depend upon the

level and standard of cricket being played. At this time of year, perennial ryegrass should easily germinate within 7 days from being sown, assuming adequate irrigation is given.

Apply a suitable fertiliser to those wickets which have been taken out of use, to aid seed germination and sward establishment.

September

With the season now closing, or closed, a thorough renovation of the square will be required. Mow the whole square to 5mm or so, to produce a fairly clean top surface. Scarify thoroughly: This could be from 3 occasions up to 10 occasions. It all depends on the standard of the square and available staffing. This will really clear out any undesirable vegetation. Scarify from corner to corner as this will be a change from the end to end direction which is carried out during the playing season.

Mow afterwards to keep the surface clean and ready to receive the seed and top-dressing. Aerate the square, ideally with a punch action solid tine machine, to 100 - 150mm depth.

Irrigating the square before it is aerated may assist in tine penetration. Sarel spike the square and then overseed at 34 - 50 g/m². Typically a pure 100% perennial ryegrass mixture is applied to the ends, whilst the main body of the square may only contain 50% of this species. Sometimes, just fescue / bent is sown in the main body of a cricket square. It all depends upon individual requirements.

A low nitrogen fertiliser can be applied, if an application hasn't already been given in August. Apply and work in a top-dressing material, using a trulute and straight edge to ensure the square is even throughout.

Germination sheets can be applied, especially at the ends, which will invariably be almost bare.

October

If renovation hasn't been completed by now, then make sure it is finished as soon as possible. Germination sheets on the ends can aid any late germination and initial establishment of seed - but watch out for disease attack. Drag brush on a regular basis, especially if dew is present.

Earthworm activity can be very high this month, so drag brushing when dry, as well as some form of chemical control may be required. Keep the square topped at a suitable height of cut - say no more than 25mm - as this will maintain a suitable sward density and prevent the sward from thinning out if it is let to grow too long. If the sward is mostly composed of fescues and bents then the height of cut will be lower than this.

Fence off the square to maintain its integrity. This will reduce the chance of animals straying onto the square, as well as hopefully keeping walkers away from the square.

November

Regular drag brushing of the square to help disperse any worm casts and keep the grass upright. Top the square at 18 - 25mm height of cut. If any material in top-dressed tine holes has sunk then carry out some additional top-dressing, although be careful not to apply too much. Maintain any perimeter fencing, if it's erected.

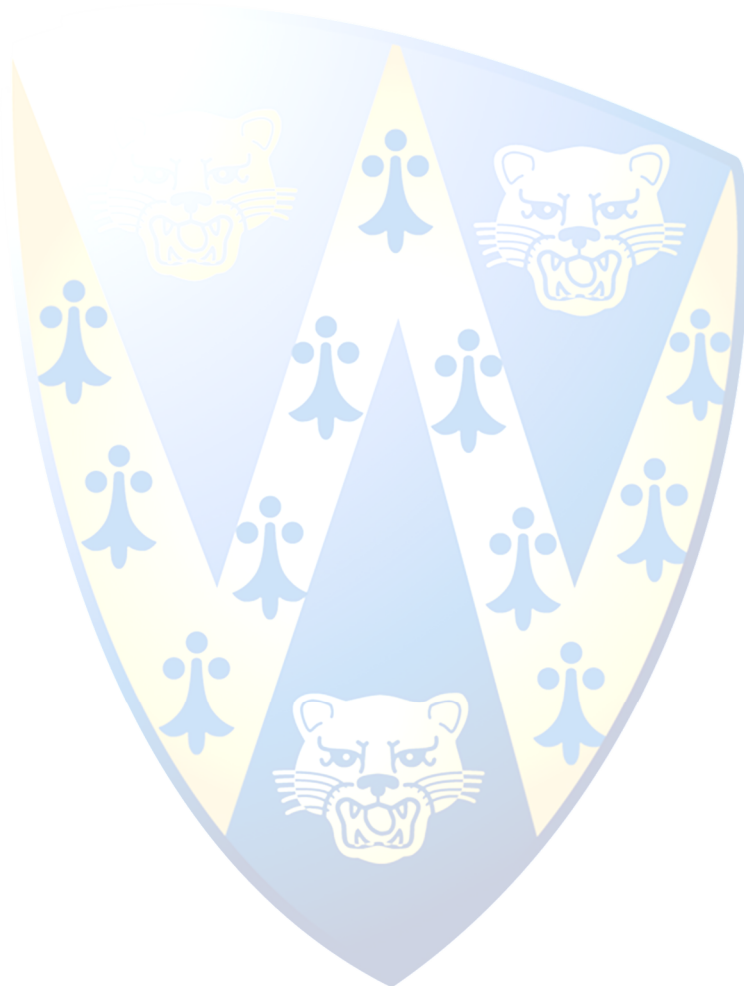
Vertidrain or other deep spike of the outfield if ground conditions are suitable.

December

Drag brush at least every other day, if not daily when ground conditions permit.
Maintain any perimeter fencing that may have been erected to protect the square from 'intruders'.
Keep the grass topped, typically to 25mm or so.

Aerate using solid tines when ground conditions permit and when there is not too much moisture present within the clay loam rootzone. Keep the outfield at a suitable height of cut - the height will depend upon whether there is any other sport taking place on it or whether the facility is fortunate enough to be just a cricket facility. Aerate the outfield as required.

Enjoy Christmas - you've deserved it !



CRICKET
SHROPSHIRE