

AUTUMN RENOVATION GUIDELINES

September and October will be a busy month for Cricket Groundsmen with thoughts of getting organised to carry out renovation work on the square. The success of any renovation work is generally down to good preparation and timing and getting it done as soon as the season ends.

If you do decide to use external contractors to carry out your renovations, ensure they have the relevant experience and machinery to do the job.

The weather will be the most important element when carrying out end of season renovations. You do not want to be topdressing when inclement weather is about because once the soil gets wet, it becomes very difficult to spread.

Timing of operations

The earlier you can get on with your renovations the better. The ideal time is from mid September through to early October. It is important to make good use of the warm soil and air temperatures as this will aid seed germination. Also, the ground should be slightly damp prior to scarification.

The following activities are usually carried out in the following order, when conditions allow.

Preparing surfaces for renovation.

Cut the entire square at the height you cut your wickets. Once this is done scarification is next on the list.

Depending on the severity of the thatch, you may need to scarify several times. Always scarify in the same direction as you would cut a wicket. **NEVER** scarify across the wickets. The depth of scarification should be between 1/3 and 1/2 inch depending on thatch content. Increase your depth of scarifying in stages. If you try to get full depth in one single operation this can often fail and can cause damage to your machinery. The biggest problem when scarifying is that groundsmen do not remove enough thatch from their squares during renovations. At the end of scarification, your square should be left looking pretty bare and the only grass remaining will be the grass you want as this will be strong and have a good root structure which is essential for making good wickets. **DO NOT BE AFRAID WHEN SCARIFYING, THE MORE YOU DO THE BETTER. I CANNOT EMPHASISE THIS ENOUGH.**

When you finish scarifying and have lifted the debris, cut the square several times in different directions to remove any remaining debris. Lastly, you should then brush the entire square to ensure you are left with a totally clean surface.

The channels you will leave from scarifying will provide a seed bed but if you can spike your square to a depth of 1/2 inch to an inch with a sorrell roller, this will also help.

Once this is done you should apply the grass seed. Most groundsmen will do this by hand. Ensure that you get as even a spread as possible. There are many varieties of seed available and I

would recommend that you ask your supplier what you should use on your square.

Next you apply the soil. There are many soil suppliers who can offer advice on what to use. I would recommend you use a loam with a 27% - 32% clay content. Do not use a cricket wicket dressing that has a lower clay content.

Spreading of the materials can be achieved by several methods such as a drop action top spreader, by hand using a shovel and a barrow or by emptying bags of soil on each wicket. It is essential that the spreading of the loam is carried out when dry conditions prevail.

The amount of loam required for each square will be dictated by the severity of the renovations and how big the square is (number of pitches on the square). Loam materials are generally supplied in 25kg bags, most club groundsmen usually spread between 6-10 bags of loam per pitch.

Do one wicket at a time and once the loam is spread on the wicket use a lute or drag brush/mat to restore the level.

After top dressing, if it does not rain for 3 - 4 days, you may be required to water the square.

The seed will germinate over a period of 10 - 14 days and once the sward is well established, roughly between 3 to 4 weeks after germination, you should cut your square to the height of 1 inch. You may need to cut again in November depending on the growth.

You should also fertilise the square at this stage to help it through the autumn/winter period. Apply a low Nitrogen (N) fertiliser product, something with a mix of 5:5:15.NPK. You should fertilise every 4 to 6 weeks to ensure that the grass remains healthy. Do not fertilise when frost is prevalent as this will damage the grass.

Between November and early March, **AERATION IS ESSENTIAL** to relieve compaction and encourage root development. Use a **solid tine spiker** as many times as possible and try to spike to a depth of 4 inches.

Depending on the growth of your sward during the winter, you may need to cut it again, keeping it at a height of 1 inch.

Towards the end of March, apply a fertiliser with a higher level of Nitrogen (9% - 12%) that has Iron in it as this will kill any moss that may have appeared during the winter months. The higher level of Nitrogen will increase the sward of grass which is essential to make good wickets.