

Summer Pitches

Grant Holmes, director of sports turf contractors Agripower reminds us there is plenty of winter work to do.



Agripower's Grant Holmes

Head off fungal attacks with fungicide application. Bad winters can produce Snow Mould (below) which hampers new season grass growth

IT IS VERY EASY for those involved with summer pitches to think that when the renovation work has been completed, all is done for the winter months. We look with some degree of satisfaction on those toiling through the winter months with football and rugby surfaces.

After normal renovation procedures of summer pitches, it is as well to be gently reminded that there is plenty of worthwhile work that can be done during the autumn, winter and early spring which will improve their appearance and performance next summer.

The main advantage of work carried out during this period is that it should not be too costly, but it does require an understanding of what turf needs over the winter to

prosper the next summer.

After end of season renovations, be aware of when the seed germinates, and when it has, keep an eye on the weather especially early morning and evenings.

Autumn can produce those misty mornings and evenings when young seed is vulnerable to attacks of post-emergence damping off where the seedling emerges but does not establish. Pre-emergence damping-off is where the seed germinates but does not emerge and the seed rots in the soil.

There is no chemical control for these diseases. However, good cultural practices such as a well prepared seed bed, even sowing of seed at the correct rate, not sowing when the soil temperatures are low and having a well drained soil will

all assist in quick germination.

The wide range of fungal diseases that can attack turf during the 'close season' can cause irreparable damage. It will show itself as you want to get summer games activities under way by having a poor and sparse growth of grass.

Fusarium Patch is the most damaging disease of turf which can occur during the winter months and is most severe on fine turf areas.

Look out for orange/brown spots 2-5cm in diameter which under suitable conditions, form larger areas. This disease appears after snow cover and again appears as orange/brown rings which are surrounded by a pale straw colour, slightly pink centre, and is called pink snow mould.

The other main turf fungal disease is Red Thread. As its name implies, its appearance is pink or red in colour and on close inspection has red 'needles' which protrude from the leaves. Attacks on this fungal disease are caused by mild temperatures, a damp surface and having a low fertility soil.

If any of your turf areas are susceptible to fungal attacks it is always more prudent to spray on fungicides as a preventative rather than a curative measure. Keep a diary of when you get an attack and the weather conditions at the time, and if you see these conditions coming on spray to prevent rather than cure.

One of the other main 'close season' problems for summer pitches is worm activity. There are chemicals on the market such as Turfclear from Scotts Professional.



This product is best applied after the turf has been cut and preferably after any aeration works. This will help the product penetrate the surface of the pitch where it is needed. Application before light rain is imminent is also recommended by the manufacturer as this helps the product to move through the surface layers.

Unfortunately, these types of chemicals can be expensive, so if your budget does not run to this, then at any time when the surface is dry, sweep, brush or use a drag mat to keep the casts dispersed. Do not attempt this when they are moist or the surface is wet!

Aeration must continue through the winter months when the surface is workable which keeps the surface 'open' throughout the winter months assists in surface drainage and helps to decrease the possibility of fungal attacks by

allowing surface moisture to drain away.

Mowing during the close season is also a task that often goes a begging. Grass can be 'topped off' during the winter months provided that frost is not forecast and the surface is dry and any machinery used does not make any indentations into the surface.

Make sure the blades are set to cut cleanly and the height of cut is not too low. The rule of thumb is twice the height of a summer cut.

Keep fallen leaves swept up and away from summer pitches as much as you can too, because if left they will encourage worm activity.

If you do have badly drained areas, do not allow water to stand. Fork it away, because if it is left, it will cause grasses to rot off and the soil becomes anaerobic.

Even in the midst of winter and in the worst weather always keep a



watchful eye on summer pitch areas. Mother Nature has a very naughty way of causing problems if left alone to get on with it during the 'close season', and if you are not vigilant then she will surely strike.

If you are ever unsure, then it is always best to seek advice from a contractor.

A mild, damp winter can cause Red Thread (above). Again, fungicide application is a job worth doing