

Seasonal Guidance: Winter Pitches

(typically, Football, Rugby, GAA)

Issued: November 2020

Grassroots playing facilities will again currently have many questions about the current and potential restrictions the Government may impose to reduce the transmission of Coronavirus with regards to winter pitch playing surfaces, their ongoing maintenance and what works may be carried out to provide a fit for play surface, or keep a pitch ticking over.

Please ensure you always follow government guidelines (www.gov.uk/coronavirus) if you work either as lone workers or as part of a team.

Grassroots playing surfaces may be maintained by the following categories:

- Professional managers and staff are advised to continue to actively consult and discuss working practices with their employers.
- Self-employed grounds staff or contractors are advised to follow the latest Government guidelines, formulate an agreed plan that includes your safe working procedure, and clearly communicate with clients in advance and agree safe working procedures.
- Volunteers should follow latest Government guidelines and not put themselves or others at risk.

This document sets out basic guidance – for the coming months.

It's the little things that matter at this time of year.

Mowing:

Regardless of whether sport is played or not mowing is still a key task – if you can get on the surface.

1. Wet or saturated soil – if you leave a footprint do not continue
2. Frozen or thawing soil / grass – if you leave a footprint do not continue
3. If you can get on to mow then only clip the grass, this will stand the plant up and expose it too much needed sunlight
4. Remove all clippings – again, this will expose the plant to light, thus aiding photosynthesis
5. **Before you do any of the above, is there any debris? This could be leaves, twigs, branches etc – they will need to be removed prior to mowing**

Aeration

What are the priorities for aeration at this time of year? As grass growth slows in the colder weather, we still need to make sure there is no excess water in the soil which will pay dividends next season. The key points are highlighted in green.

- Improves water uptake
- Improves nutrient uptake
- **Reduces water runoff and puddling**
- **Encourages stronger roots**
- Reduces soil compaction
- Improves drought stress tolerance

Local repairs to playing surfaces

Where possible, and where resources permit take time to repair those areas that have always caused issues. Typically, at this time of year this will be carried out by way of hand forking.

Remember!

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

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Closing statement

Please always ensure you adhere to up to date government guidelines (www.gov.uk/coronavirus) regarding the current situation.

The GMA's core message to winter pitch ground staff / volunteers is to ideally continue with all, or most, of the typical good maintenance practices but at a reduced intensity to meet the needs of your particular pitch.

An ongoing dialogue with your club and leagues will be necessary to ensure sufficient lead in time to get the surface safe and match ready.

Additional grounds management support/ resources

For volunteers looking to gain further knowledge of maintaining pitches at community levels, the GMA's Level 1 online training course provides an overview of basic tasks to help upskill volunteers. See here for further details.

<https://thegma.org.uk/learning/training>