

Cricket Pre-season

Prepare your square, outfield, and NTPs for the coming season



PRE-SEASON MAINTENANCE TASKS

Square

- Start to lower the height of cut.
- Smooth the surface and begin initial compaction through rolling.
- Square off and mark pitches.
- Create a pitch plan.
- Applying fertiliser and managing pests.

Outfield

- Mowing and lowering the height of cut.
- Decompaction and smoothing the surface.
- Repairs and renovations.

Non-Turf Pitches (NTPs) and practice nets

- Pre-season NTP maintenance practices.
- Checking, preparing, and repairing net areas.



MOWING THE SQUARE

Regular mowing is important because it...

- Provides the right length of grass to facilitate good ball roll.
- Encourages density and the grass leaf to thicken.
- Avoids “crowning” on the surface.
- Improves presentation and ground aesthetics.

Method

- Move from rotary to cylinder mower (doubles up as light rolling).
- Alternate mowing pattern (Union Jack) before sticking to line of play.
- Always box-off to collect clippings on the square.

Height of cut

- Start at winter height (20mm-25mm).
- Gradually reduce to in-season height of 12mm-18mm.
- Never remove more than a third of the leaf in one cutting window.
- Be flexible based on conditions – if the weather is hot and dry, leave the grass a little longer.



PRE-SEASON ROLLING

The aim is to evenly compact the surface, to a depth of around 75mm-100mm, and smooth out minor surface undulations. This will help to produce quality pitches during the season.

Method

- Light roll at the earliest opportunity in the spring.
- Gradually increase the weight, the process may take several weeks to complete, and finish off with the heavy roller.
- Roll in all directions – the Union Jack pattern.

When to roll

- The roller should never noticeably mark or deform the soil or discolour the grass.
- Use the rule of thumb to judge conditions.
- If the soil is too wet, rolling will not be effective to depth and may cause damage to the square.

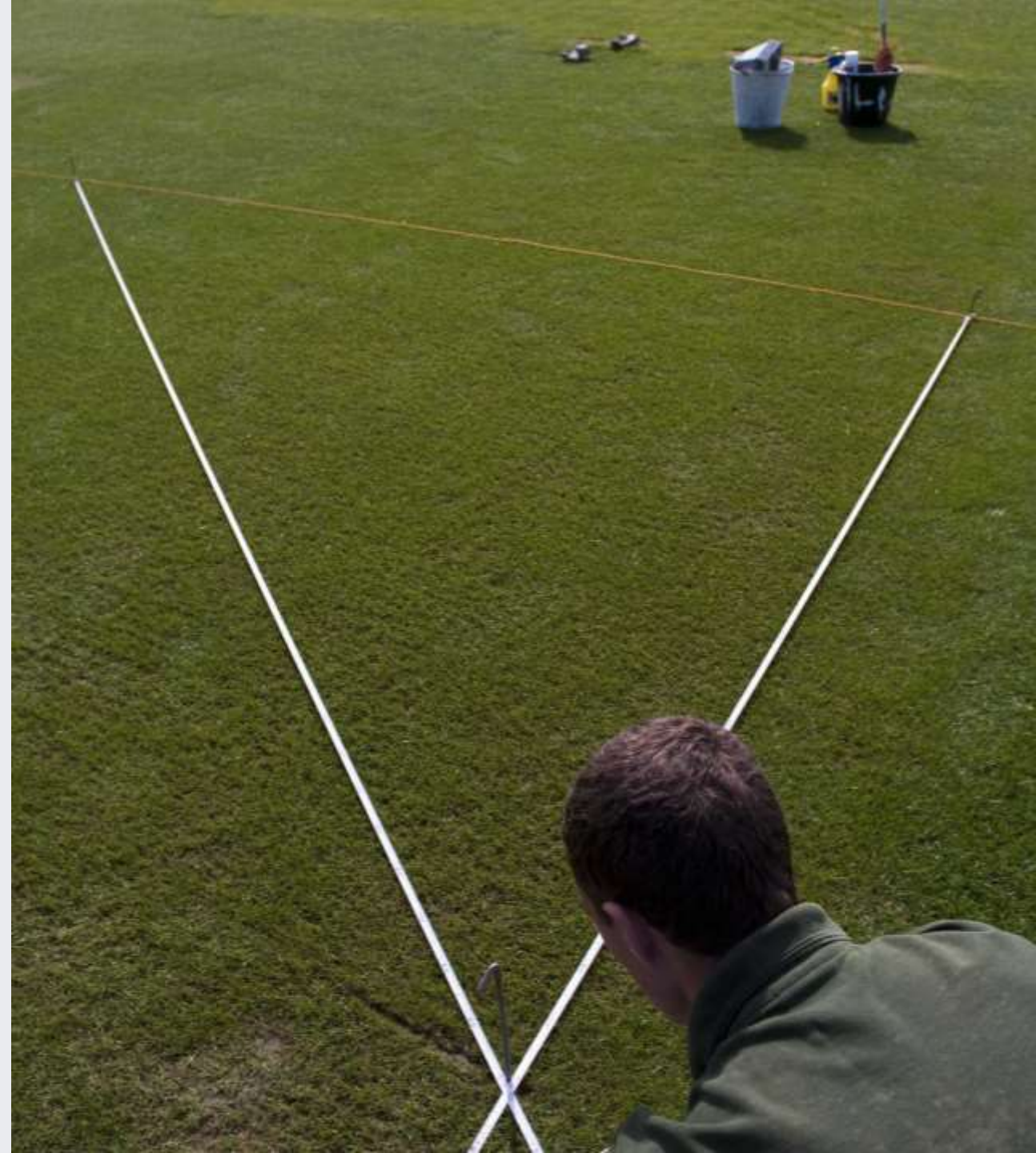


SQUARING THE SQUARE

Prior to the season start we need to square the square, mark individual pitch positions, and ensure they are 22 yards in length.

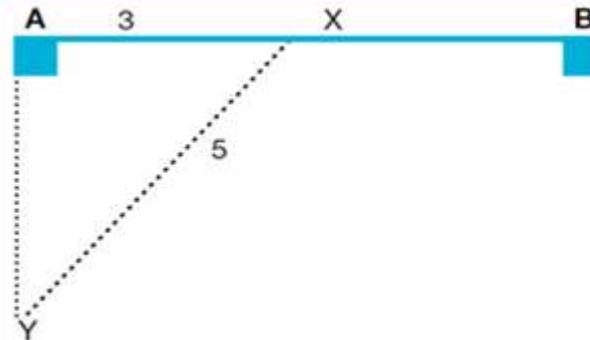
Method

- To establish the corners of the square are at right-angles we use the 3, 4, 5 method.
- Markers can then be installed into the corners.
- Mark your pitch edges (often a 'T' shape), and if it helps, your pitch centres too (with a straight line).
- Keep overmarking throughout the season.
- Periodically check the correct distances are being maintained.





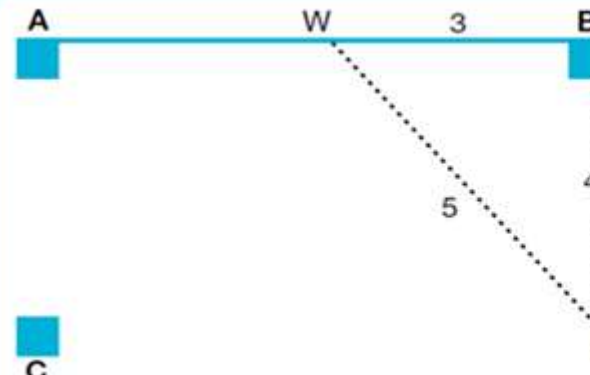
1. Place a taut line to produce the base line and mark the corner positions A and B



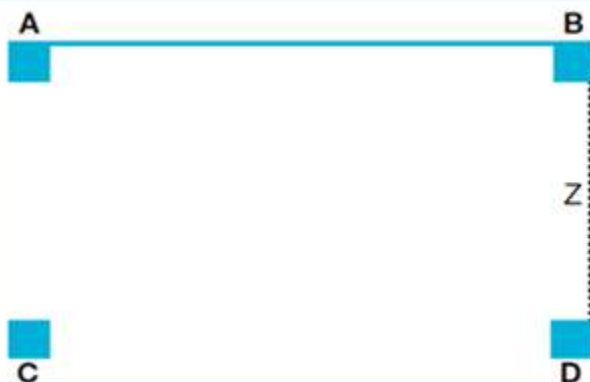
2. From the corner peg A extend a tape for 30m point X. Extend a tape 40m from A to Y. The distance from Y to X must be 50m, which will give a right angle at A.



3. Extend the line A - Y for a length of 90 - 120m to identify the 3rd corner peg of the pitch at point C



4. From the corner peg B extend a tape for 30m point W. Extend a tape 40m from B-Z. The distance from Z-W must be 50m which will give you a right angle at B.



5. Extend the line B - Z to the required length to produce the 4th corner peg at point D. A complete rectangle is now made for the pitch. The accuracy can be checked by measuring the diagonals A - D and B - C

CREATING A PITCH PLAN

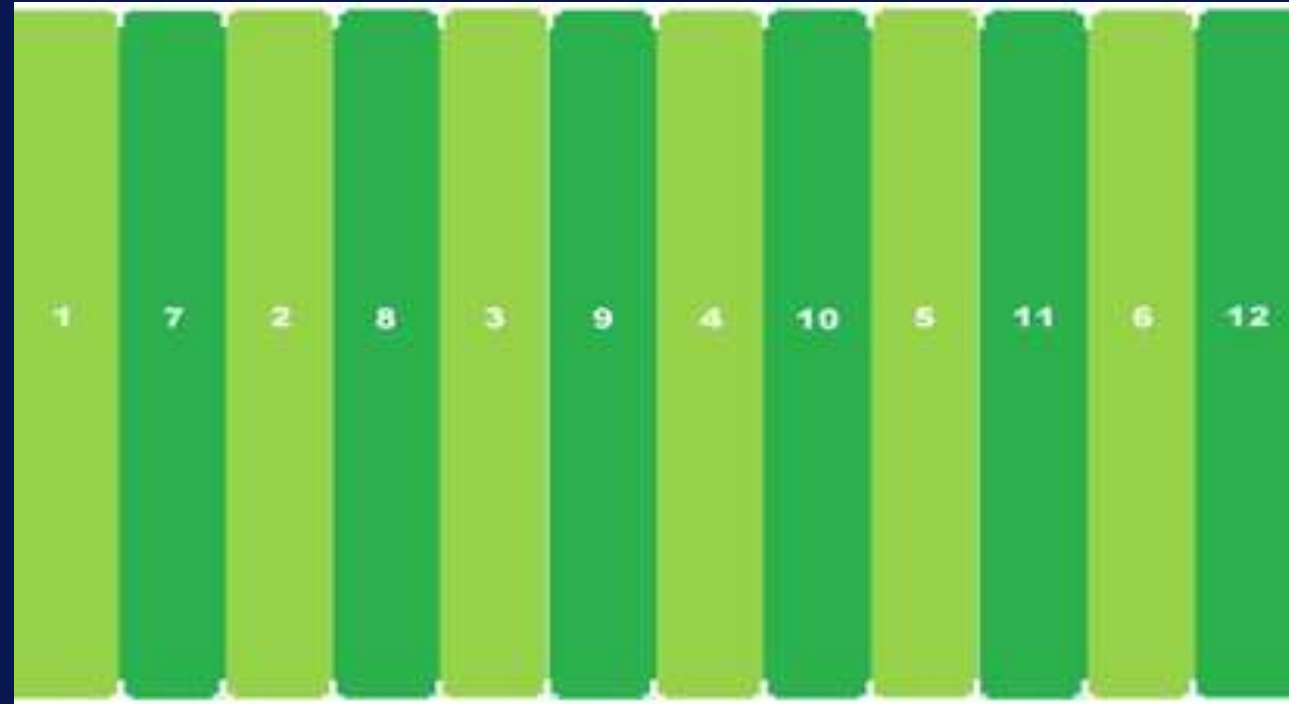
Make sure that you use the right pitches for the right level of cricket at your ground, and that you know which pitches need to be prepared in which order. Create a plan of your square and match the fixtures to the pitches.

Method

- Once fixtures are known, and in advance of any individual pitch preparation, write down a pitch schedule.
- Aim to use each pitch for 4 or 5 matches, on a sliding scale of standard i.e. 1st XI - 2nd XI - T20 - 3rd XI/Women's - U15.
- Avoid using pitches next to each other, one after the other. Play on one pitch could damage the one next to it whilst it is in prep.
- Be prepared for disruption caused by additional fixtures and those re-scheduled due to rain – you will need to be flexible

Benefits

- Even pitch wear across the square.
- Get the best use of all the pitches, assisting in producing good quality surfaces.
- Mid-season renovations and repairs to individual pitches will be more successful because play will be moved to a different part of the square.



APPLYING FERTILISER

The grass plant needs nutrients to grow and develop, to resist and recover from wear, and to prevent disease. Without applying sufficient fertiliser, it will be harder to recover pitches, maintain a good cover of the right grasses (weeds and weed grasses are better adapted to poor nutrient conditions) and to resist disease.

You should speak to your fertiliser supplier for a soil analysis and advice on which fertilisers to apply, but in general a March/April application of a 'Spring/Summer Fertiliser' is a good starting point.

The amount you will need will depend on the size of your square. Always consult the product label to determine the correct application rate.

Always store and handle fertilisers in line with COSHH and the product label. The supplier should be able to provide a Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) to help with this. If in doubt – speak to your supplier.

MANAGING PESTS

The most common pest on a cricket square is the earthworm. Removing worm casts can be a challenge but regular brushing or drag matting - particularly in dry conditions can help to disperse casts.

Most broad-leaved weeds can be managed by hand. Walk the square removing the weeds and plugging with loam and seeding. Where weeds are more widespread, use of a selective herbicide may be beneficial but first, see if there is a cultural control such as adjusting nutrients, verticutting, aeration or mowing heights.

Because the grass plant is often under stress on a cricket square fungal diseases can be common. To reduce disease risk...

- Brush to remove dew and get air to flow to the base of the plant.
- Keep your mower sharp and set it correctly to provide a clean cut. Ripped or torn leaves create weaknesses in the grass plant that fungal diseases can attack.
- Get your plant nutrition right. You can control the early onset of red thread by applying a nitrogen containing fertiliser. Fusarium likes lush, over fed grass in cooler temperatures which is why autumn/winter feeds should be lower in nitrogen.
- Try not to leave flat sheet covers down for long periods as this creates ideal conditions for disease.

MOWING OUTFIELDS

Regular mowing is important because it...

- Provides the right length of grass to facilitate good ball roll.
- Encourages sward density and supports player safety when moving and diving.
- Controls weeds.
- Smooths the surface.
- Improves presentation and ground aesthetics.

Method

- Move from rotary to cylinder mower.
- Continue to use low ground pressure turf tyres until weather and ground conditions become drier.
- Increase mowing frequency towards the season as ground conditions allow.
- Start to mow in the in-season pattern.

Height of cut

- Start at winter height (20mm-40mm).
- Gradually reduce to in-season height of 10mm-20mm.
- Never remove more than a third of the leaf in one cutting window.
- Be flexible based on conditions – if the weather is hot and dry, leave the grass a little longer.



OUTFIELD SMOOTHING AND DE-COMPACTION

A smooth outfield can improve the speed and reduce the deviation of ball roll across the outfield. The best way to improve minor surface levels in outfields is to use a large solid tine aerator (not a roller) set with a bit of heave to lift the soil upwards, restructuring it slightly. The rear roller on the aerator then smooths the lifted soil. This provides the double benefit of aerating and smoothing the outfield.

It is likely that you will need to de-compact your outfield so in addition to the solid tine aerator, other techniques include...

- Hollow tines that remove plugs of soil which can be collected or broken down. This can help reduce thatch as well as aerating.
- A slitter can be used to slice through thatchy surfaces or surfaces that have become capped which can help drainage, however these machines rarely work to depth and so do not provide effective deep de-compaction.
- Rotary-knife de-compactors slice the soil more deeply by cutting a blade into the soil to depths of 200mm-300mm. These aerators can be effective at de-compacting outfields and improving drainage but will cut lines into the surface – in shrinking and swelling clay soils, these cracks can open as the soil dries which can adversely affect ball roll – so be careful when using on these soils. In shrinking and swelling clay soils this technique might be limited to post-season work.



OUTFIELD REPAIRS

Be sure to renovate and repair any damage to surface levels or grass cover caused by winter sports before the cricket season.

Method

- Target goal mouth and other high wear area repair using rootzone, grass seed and fertiliser.
- Use germination sheets to establish grass more quickly in cooler pre-season temperatures.
- Remove goal posts and make good sockets (noting location!) to ensure that they are safe for cricket use.
- Restore surface levels across pitch areas using harrows, drag mats and other similar tools.
- Scarification of the outfield if budgets allow (always collect arisings).
- Overseeding and fertiliser application.
- Solid tine aeration.
- Sand or rootzone topdressing (if budgets allow).



NTP PRE-SEASON MAINTENANCE

There are two main construction methods of non-turf surface:

1. Engineered base- solid concrete or tarmac base.
2. Dynamic base – compacted granular stone designed to mimic the way a natural pitch plays.

Make sure you establish which one you have as the maintenance procedures are different.

Synthetic surfaces are not maintenance free; the carpet needs cleaning, and a dynamic base need re-levelling and rolled on a regular basis with a light roller. Refer to your manufacturer's instructions on the right moisture conditions for carrying out maintenance including rolling of a dynamic base.

Lack of maintenance will cause the surface to become dirty, and a lack of rolling can cause the surface to become uneven and even dangerous.

Weeds and moss must be controlled by regular brushing to stand up the pile, which in turn helps drainage reducing likelihood of moss forming. Individual weeds can be removed by hand. If necessary, weeds and moss can be controlled using suitable products for synthetic turf. Always follow the product label and conform to applicable pesticide legislation when using herbicides or other pesticides.

Edges can be maintained by hand to help define the pitch. Some overgrowth of the margin is factored in to hold the carpet in place, but this should not exceed ca 75 mm each side and should be trimmed to straight lines - be careful not to cut through the backing of the carpet when doing this.

Always check for tears in the carpet and shockpad and repair where necessary. Repairs should be made by someone with the right materials and equipment to make a safe repair - contact your supplier for information.



PREPARING NETS SAFELY

Depending on how you manage your nets they may have been subject to leaf fall, winter weed and moss growth, winter damage due to wind or flooding and unfortunately even vandalism.

Most cricket nets have a non-turf surface - in which case you should follow the same advice as provided for NTPs. For turf nets, follow the same advice for the square.

Some things to check could be...

- Run-ups are safe and level.
- Structural integrity of the framework and connections.
- Reinstalling and repairing netting.
- Any power supply is in a safe condition – consult an electrician if required.

Some parts of these tasks may require working at height and with ladders. Always carry out a risk assessment and develop a safe way of working.





**GROUNDS
MANAGEMENT
ASSOCIATION**

ANDREW WELSBY

Regional Pitch Advisor
Cricket – North and Midlands

 **07706 353 178**

 **awelsby@thegma.org.uk**

 **thegma.org.uk**

