



# Renovating Your Wicket

A guide to pre-season renovation of a  
cricket pitch square in Victoria

# Why Do We Renovate?

- ▶ We renovate a cricket pitch square to remove the build up of thatch and dead organic matter that is located on the surface and the top layer of the clay profile along with any other undesirable material that may enter the profile over the off season.
- ▶ This thins out the runners (stolons) of the couch grass along with allowing the keying of the top dress into the profile which prevents layering. Scarifying also ensures that layering does not occur by binding the new black clay to the existing profile directly.
- ▶ The scarifying and top dress help to level out the cricket square where there maybe highs or lows.
- ▶ Removing the dead organic matter also assists in preventing the potential habitat for pests and diseases, while keeping the desirable elements of an Australian pitch (pace and bounce).



# General Machinery & Equipment Requirements

- ▶ Roller
- ▶ Cylinder Mower
- ▶ Rotary Mower
- ▶ Yard Vacuum (optional)
- ▶ Scarifier
- ▶ Leaf Blower (optional)
- ▶ Lawn Leveller
- ▶ Large Levelling Frame
- ▶ General tools (shovel, leaf rake, wheel barrow etc.)
- ▶ Fertiliser spreader
- ▶ Growth Mat (desirable)
- ▶ Trailer or ute (to remove debris/organic matter)
- ▶ Spiked roller (optional)



# Material Requirements



Processed Black Clay - Work on approximately .4 of a cubic metre per pitch. A five wicket block requires 2 cubic metres (two bulka bags of soil) which equates to a 5mm top dress. Desirable for the clay to be processed at less than 5mm



Fertiliser - Spring start fertiliser granular (early September) or all season fertiliser (late September/October)



Rye Grass Seed - (optional)

# First Step Prior to Commencing Work

- ▶ Assess the wicket damage through any off season sport, weather and general traffic. Dual use grounds in particular Rugby and Aussie Rules can move the clay around substantially. You may need to roll the square to level it out prior to commencing any renovation work. This will also help with deciding how much soil you need
- ▶ Square must be dry before commencing any work. Depending on your time frame and available volunteers/assistance you may need to cover your pitch in the lead up to the work to ensure you can complete the work.
- ▶ Ideally you've had a chance to remove any undesirable plants that may have got an opportunity to set foot, however if renovating is the priority with weed control an on going part of pitch maintenance
- ▶ If possible renovations should be completed three to four weeks out from the first fixture to allow adequate time for the couch to reestablish.





# Beginning a Renovation

- ▶ If your square has grass coverage and is reasonably flat, you can use your cylinder mower to first cut as low as possible without damaging your mower's blades or use your rotary mower on the lowest setting.
- ▶ If there is minimal grass coverage, get straight into scarifying the table. Aim to cut 3mm into the surface. Do the pitch length ways first. If you are working in a team, have a second person follow you with a rotary mower on a low setting to collect the matter that is vertically cut out of the pitch.
- ▶ Once you have completed north/south directions, go across the width of the table (east/west) with the scarifier again. After each pass of the table, ensure to remove all the loose matter with a yard vacuum or rotary mower.
- ▶ If any high points are noticeable, spend extra time running the scarifier over these areas to flatten them out.

# Continuing of scarification

- ▶ Scarify the table in a diagonal direction (NW/SE) continuing at the 3mm. Noticeably less material should be prevalent. Again after the first pass, remove the material that has been cut out of the surface.
- ▶ Complete the final direction of scarifying in the opposite diagonal direction (NE/SW) and complete the clean up run. You can also use a leaf blower to remove any of the loose material on the surface.
- ▶ Ideally you'll have a bare and clean black/brown surface with small amount of stem structure visible from your couch plant.



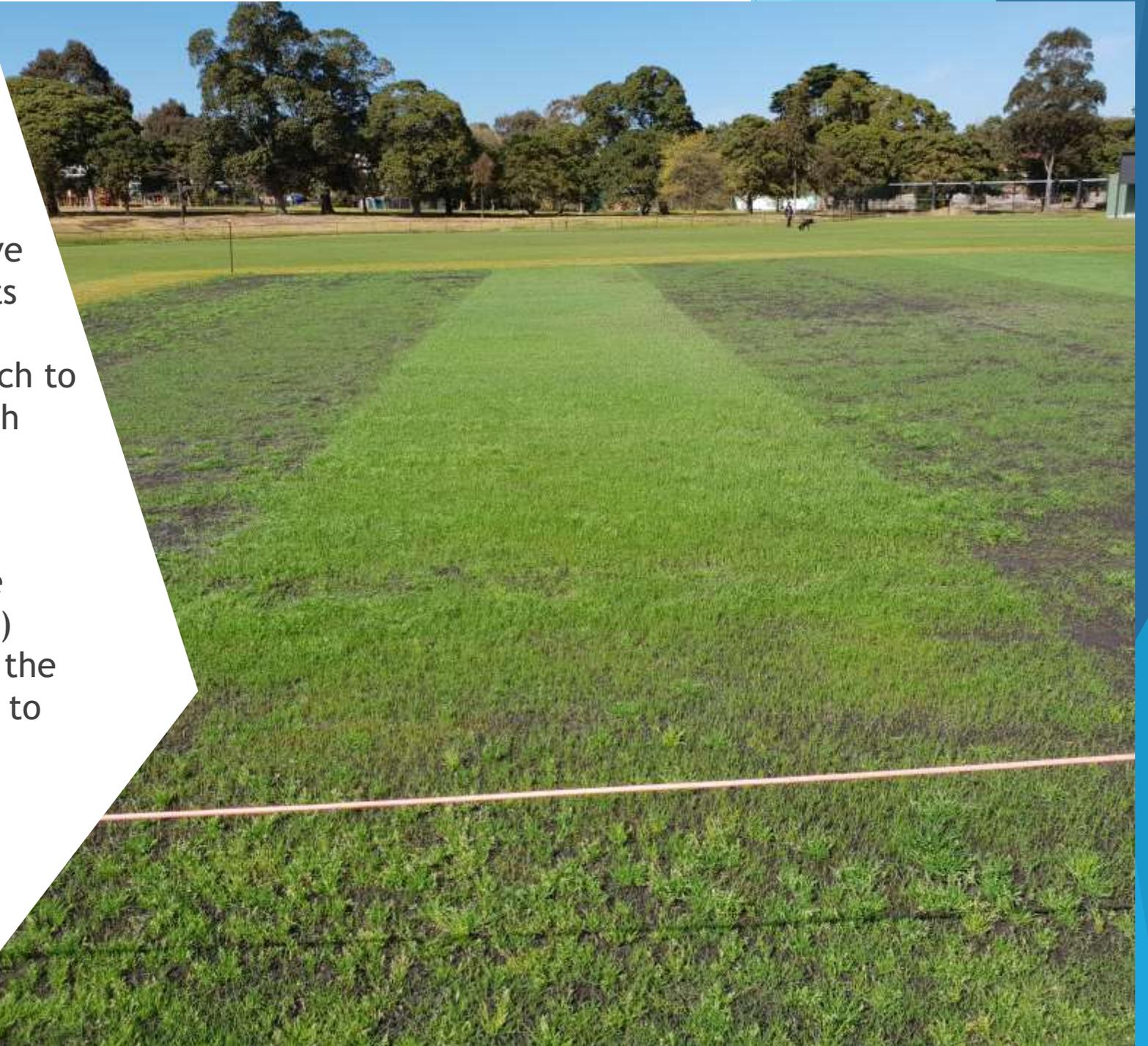
# Levelling the surface

- ▶ You can consider aerating with a spiked roller before continuing.
- ▶ From here you spread your processed clay over the wicket block. Using either a small tractor mounted grader with laser level or a large levelling frame to level off. Use the lawn leveler to touch up any smaller areas.
- ▶ Drag the large screed/levelling frame in all directions, similar to how you used the scarifier.
- ▶ If the clay is not finely processed and larger than 5mm in size you may want to give one pass of the roller over the pitch to help break up the clay and ensure quicker binding with the existing profile which also allows the rejuvenating turf to come through easier.
- ▶ Going over with the roller may also help identify any low spots that may still require further top dressing. Use the levelling equipment again.
- ▶ You may over sow one or two pitches with perennial rye grass while the couch grass regains coverage. Use the side wickets so the couch grass on the recovering wickets is not competing with the rye. You can also use a spiked roller for seeding purposes.



# Finishing off

- ▶ Fertilise the pitch and if you have access to full square growth mats place on or if you have a single growth mat, select your first pitch to use for the season and cover with the mat.
- ▶ Rope off square.
- ▶ Irrigate the pitch daily to ensure germination of rye grass (if used) and the binding of the clay with the existing profile, allow the water to pool on the surface but not run.



# Slurry Levelling

- ▶ An additional technique to levelling off your recently renovated pitch is Slurry Levelling.
- ▶ This involves saturating your surface and the using a weight heavy hose (filled with water) and dragging it across the surface.
- ▶ This technique should not be tried without experienced hands and can be quite messy if the saturation levels haven't been met. The new clay must be at excess saturation levels for this to work other wise it can meet and clump together, undoing the good work.
- ▶ Don't do if the top dress is over 5mm in depth.





# Layering

- ▶ Layering is when the clay profile becomes separated, this can occur through several different scenarios but the most common is through a poor or no renovation that is followed by a top dressing with clay.
- ▶ Layering causes inconsistencies in the pitch preparation along with playability and if allowed to progress can cause irreparable damage to the square.
- ▶ It is always important to ensure any clay that is added to the profile is not separated by the existing turf on the pitch.

# Do's

- ▶ REMOVE ALL GRASS LEAF
- ▶ VACUUM/BLOW ALL LOOSE CLIPPINGS
- ▶ SCARIFY TO AT LEAST 3MM INTO BLACKSOIL
- ▶ REMOVE ALL LOOSE PLANT & SOIL DEBRIS BEFORE SPREADING NEW BLACKSOIL
- ▶ USE A LONG SPREADING BAR TO LEVEL SOIL
- ▶ SPREAD NEW BLACKSOIL TO A MAXIMUM DEPTH OF 8MM
- ▶ WATER DAILY FOR 1 WEEK FOLLOWING RENO
- ▶ FILL LOW AREA WHEN NEW SHOOTS ARE HIGHER THAN THE SURROUNDING SOIL LEVEL
- ▶ MOW ESTABLISHED GRASS TO ENCOURAGE LATERAL GROWTH (TRY TO ALLOW AT LEAST TWO WEEKS RECOVERY PRIOR TO FIRST MOW)



# Don'ts

- ▶ EXCEED 8MM OF NEW BLACKSOIL IN A LOW AREA
- ▶ SLURRY IF THE NEWLY SPREAD BLACKSOIL DEPTH EXCEEDS 5MM
- ▶ BE IMPATIENT



# A healthy pitch

- ▶ In closing, a strong renovation on your square will ensure the life and longevity of the pitch and enable the curator to produce even and consistent wickets.

