

Alan Lewis Ltd

Sports Surface Consultant and Groundstaff Mentor

The Effects and control of thatch

Taking a profile of your green will tell you if you have **Thatch**.

Thatch is a layer of organic matter at the top of your profile.

You will still be able to see the structure of the grass plant, dead or alive ie stems and roots.

Thatch acts as a barrier, so it stops the movement of water, nutrients and effects root growth. It can often lead to a problem called Dry patch.

Thatch will produce a slow, soft green.

If you have a thatch layer and it is wet, the wood sits in the thatch and you lose the effect of the bias.

Thatch is also a source of food for many pests and diseases particularly Chafer Grubs and Leather Jackets. Larger mammals that come looking for the Chafer grubs and Leather Jackets include badgers, foxes and birds which in turn can make a mess of the green or even destroy a green.

PH is the management of acidity and alkalinity and can affect a lot of things on a green. Often if you have a lot of thatch on your green, it will probably be quite acidic because of the breakdown of the organic matter.

Recommendation is that you have your green tested at least on an annual basis with a soil test so you know what feed you should put on the green.

Why have we got thatch? – not **scarifying** or **verticutting** enough through the season
(this keeps the green clean and prevents dead material building up)

- Not scarifying hard enough at the end of the season
(Your profile will tell you how much thatch you have and how Deep you need to go and also what type of machine to use)
- Annual meadow grass (Poa Annua) on a green
(When it dies each year it produces organic matter and it also loses it's leaves through the year to look a yellow grass)

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The higher the % of annual meadow grass in your green will mean the higher the chance of having a lot of thatch in the green.

Annual meadow grass likes 'limey' conditions and doesn't like being disturbed, the better grasses like acidic conditions.

You should be verticutting or grooming your green regularly to stand the grasses upright to maintain the grass speed.

Annual Meadow Grass likes a lot of water so do not over water your green.

Aerate on a regular basis to get the water you put on, into the green.

How do we control it? - short term option is to take the top of the green off if you have a thick layer of thatch **but** this will probably mean you will not bowl the following season.

- **Recommendation** is to implement a programme of scarification.

Do not think you can deal with this all in one go – think about a **3 year programme**

There is a choice of scarifiers, surface scarifiers and deep scarifiers.

Surface scarifiers will go in approx 5-6mm – great for surface thatch, but when you get a layer deeper than that, then you need to think about a more powerful scarifier but be careful when using them.

Never scarify deeper than your thatch layer- if you do, you bring up soil and cover the thatch making it more difficult to clear out the thatch in the future.

Only scarify in two directions with the more powerful machines.

Dry Patch – is a condition on the green which is easy to see because around the edges of these areas you will have very bright green grass because the water cannot get in, so it runs to the edges of the dry patch creating new growth.

This requires a regular aeration programme – look at your profile.

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Think about the number of times you cut the green, the number of times people walk on your green – creating compaction – which helps develop dry patch and thatch.

Wetting agents will also help dry patch but it must be a preventative wetting agent so that the water can get into the soil – **please take advice on this**

During the season only scarify the grass plant, end of season you can go deeper.

Usually after 3 years the green will firm up becoming a better bowling green.