

Active playing surfaces

An active playing surface is an area for playing used for competition. As a rule of thumb, it is the area “inside the lines” where the players are engaging in competition (i.e. it does not include run-on areas, behind the dead ball line or just inside the perimeter fence). Examples of active playing areas:

- » a grass cricket wicket and practice wickets
- » a grass running or racetrack
- » a bicycle racecourse
- » a green (that is, croquet, bowling or golf)
- » a golf tee-off area
- » a tennis court
- » any other principal part of a sportsground used during a sport game or competition, including in schools.



Planning and installation

If setting up an irrigation system for an active playing surface, you should contact your local water service provider to find out any conditions that might apply: it is common practice to require registration of the surface, installation of a specific water meter, record keeping and signage.

- » It is strongly recommended to have undertaken an audit to develop the base irrigation schedule.
- » It is recommended to have a management plan in place that outlines tasks and responsibilities for irrigating and maintaining the active playing surface.
- » It is recommended that a landscape/playing surface manager be nominated to oversee the management and irrigation of the irrigated areas.



- » Use Smart Watermark products.
- » Where possible, a water meter should be installed to specifically measure and monitor the amount of water used on the playing surface.

Maintenance activities

Maintenance activities are as important as irrigation to maintain healthy grass and to ensure “playability” and safety of active playing surfaces. Regular maintenance activities include:

- » checking for leaks and blockages
- » aerating the soil
- » de-thatching the grass
- » applying wetting agents.



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Efficient watering

- » Check with your local water service provider for water restrictions that may apply in your local area.
- » Water early morning (5–10 am), or in the evening (after 5 pm), to reduce water loss from evaporation and wind.
- » Check spray patterns to make sure irrigation is uniform.
- » Regularly audit the irrigation schedule, adjusting your irrigation system as the weather and usage of the active playing surface changes.
- » Schedule heavy watering on a rotation when the field is not in use to promote deep root growth.
- » Try to schedule watering to minimise playing on wet soils. High wear areas typically get watered at double the frequency of lesser used areas to assist with turf recovery.
- » Only mow when necessary and outside the heat of the day.

Irrigate as needed

Infrequent but thorough soakings may benefit grass by encouraging deep roots. Stretch the intervals between watering based on observations.

Signs that your grass is ready for watering is:

- » changing colour.
- » the soil below is difficult to penetrate using a sharp object.
- » your grass doesn't spring back after being walked on.

You might be overwatering if there is fungus (toadstools) or moss, or there are bright green patches, in your grass.



Soil aeration

Aerating your soil can improve its water penetration, by encouraging deeper root growth and reducing run off. It is particularly important for active playing surfaces that are frequently used when wet. For active playing surfaces, it is recommended to aerate the soil up to 12 times a year when there are more than 800 users per week, and 4–6 times a year when there are less than 800 users per week. Solid tine aerators with an additional 'kick' have been found to give good results.



Turf selection

Providing a species with low water use and superior drought resistance is a primary method of decreasing water needs. Warm season grasses such as buffalo, couch and kikuyu are recommended. Selection of grass species will relate to the intended use, period of main use and soil types. Talk to a turf expert for further advice.

System management

- » Adopt the management practices outlined in the Efficient irrigation for water conservation: guidelines for water efficient urban gardens and landscapes.
- » Do not irrigate before forecasted or during rain. Rain switches and soil moisture probes are available which can automatically turn your irrigation system off during wet weather.
- » Keep a record of weekly water usage. This will give you feedback on how you are tracking and whether you need to adjust your irrigation scheduling.



Irrigation system audit

An irrigation system audit can check it is operating at the optimum level using the minimum amount of water. An audit can assist in the development of an irrigation schedule. A Certified Irrigation professional can undertake an audit.