

Worm Information

There are many species of earthworms in the UK. Worms provide a valuable contribution to plant and soil health, breaking down excess organic matter, creating pore spaces and channels in the soil profile improving ingress of air, water and nutrients.

Sadly, the benefits of worms are often negated by the detrimental effect of a small minority of species which produce castings at the surface where they are easily smeared by foot or machines creating muddy conditions, an uneven playing surface, smothering grasses and providing an ideal environment for weed seeds to germinate.

Points to consider about negative impact of worm castings:

- Where worms are active the surface is less free draining.
- Worms encourage feeding animals, such as foxes, badgers and digging birds.
- Casts get in mower blades and on rollers etc, resulting in varied mowing heights, scalping and poor cutting blades.
- Casts create ideal seed beds for weed seeds etc.
- Casts create bare area, often worse than play alone.
- Over time casts can have major effects on surface levels.

Eradication of the worm population is neither practical nor achievable and managing both the population and the detrimental effects of casts is the only practical option.

Cultural modifications to discourage worms can be an effective option. But for those with heavy soils and wet winters this is not always an easy option, which can force people into using something that works quickly, saponins (soil conditioners).

- Mechanical control and management are favoured through regular switching/drag matting or brushing of the surface when casts are in a dry enough condition to break up and spread without smearing of the turf surface.
- Removing leaf litter and other organic matter will help to reduce the surface food for the worms.
- Box off clippings and keep organic matter and thatch to a minimum by regular verticutting/brushing and thorough end of season renovations.
- Do not over feed, this will encourage top growth and in turn more organic material.
- Keep the surface free draining, so any winter aeration work will assist in this, the wetter the surface/profile the more worms will be active.
- There are no approved pesticides for worm control, market products contain surfactants & sulphur & only control for short periods.
- Worms are particularly active in spring and autumn on alkaline soils, acidifying can help but this will have a negative impact on Ryegrass swards. Available acidifiers include chelated iron, and sulphur (take advice from your amenity sales rep before considering these, as they have other effects on the turf,
- On basic level sports pitches preventative products are rarely the preferred option due to ongoing cost to the clubs unless worm casts become so abundant that machinery becomes clogged.
- Outfields- as above where possible but more than likely options are limited to just dispersing the casts using anything that works for you. Some groundsmen use drag mats/brushes/old plastic fencing/reinforced mesh/harrows, once the casts have dried later in the day.