Fosse Contracts Limited, 28 Cannock Street, Leicester LE4 9HR
Telephone: (0116) 246 0500 Facsimile: (0116) 246 1561
E-mail: info@fossecontracts.co.uk

GENERAL COURT CARE COMMON TO ALL TENNIS SURFACES

Footwear

Good quality tennis shoes are recommended for all surfaces. Training shoes or other types of footwear with bars, studs or sharp serrations on the soles should not be used.

Players will find it advantageous to have two or three pairs of shoes with different sole types. For instance, a smooth sole that may give perfect grip on a dry surface may need to be replaced with a sole with more grip when the same surface is damp or wet. Similarly some sole types may give too firm a foothold on some surfaces which may over-stress knees and ankles etc. Trial and error will soon indicate the optimum sole for any given type and condition of surface.

It is useful to have a notice at the entrance to the court recommending the correct type of footwear. A player wearing incorrect shoes with aggressive soles can do a great deal of damage in a very short time.

It is also wise to avoid black soles on painted surfaces because these tend to leave unsightly black marks which are difficult to remove.

It is advisable to have some form of mat, scraper or shoe-cleaning device at the entrance to the court so that players can clean their shoes before going on court.

Furniture, toys and equipment on the court

Most surfaces will be indented and therefore damaged by heavy or sharp objects standing on the court.

Umpire's chairs, garden seats etc. should not be put directly onto the surface, but boards or pads should be placed under the legs to spread the load.

It is also essential to prohibit roller-skates, skateboards, bicycles, wheelbarrows full of sand and anything else that children may bring on the court and which could do damage to the surface. Family pets should also be excluded.

Machinery being used on the court surface, such as compressors, water-pumps etc. should be stood at all times on a piece of plywood or similar.

The court perimeter

A strip of ground at least 600mm (2ft) wide outside the surround fence should be kept clear of vegetation at all times to form a barrier against plant and weed encroachment onto the playing surface. This may be done quite simply with an appropriate weedkiller. It follows from this that climbing plants such as roses or clematis should not be planted to grow up the surround fencing. Not only may their roots disturb the court surface and their leaves pollute it but they also may cause severe damage to the fencing during high winds.

Shrubs, trees and hedges should be planted as far back from the court as possible, certainly allowing sufficient room between the surround fence and plants for maintenance to be carried out between them.

Tree roots

Trees, hedges and shrubs to be planted close to the court should be chosen carefully to avoid any with aggressive root systems, such as poplars and sycamores, as these can cause major disturbance of the surface. If their use is essential, the insertion of a root barrier between the trees and the court is strongly recommended, just as it is when the court has to be sited near mature specimens.

Overhanging branches

Branches of trees which overhang the court invariably cause problems. Water dripping from the branches may cause slippery or discoloured patches, encourage the growth of algae or moss and sometimes even erode the surface. The secretions of aphids coat the court surface with a sticky blackish substance which may impair foothold and encourage algae and, in severe cases, damage the surface paint. Last, but by no means least, the droppings of larger birds, such as pigeons and collared doves, can cause damage especially to painted macadam surfaces during the summer months. For all these reasons overhanging branches should be pruned well back.

Substances to keep away from tennis courts

Cigarettes

All tennis courts should be made a "No Smoking" area. Cigarettes are unlikely to constitute a fire hazard but cigarette ends will leave unsightly burn marks on most surfaces.

Chewing-gum

This should always be banned from tennis courts. Chewing gum is invariably difficult to remove although some advise the use of ice cubes which harden the gum and allow it to be broken away more easily.

Petrol, oil and solvents

Petrol, oil or solvent spillages will seriously damage most surfaces, especially those that are bitumen-bound or are superimposed upon a bitumen-bound sub-base. Great care should be taken to ensure that any machinery used within the court area, such as a garden vacuum cleaner, is clean and in good repair and does not drip petrol or oil. It is strongly recommended that machines be removed from the court surface before refilling with petrol, diesel or oil. In the event of a spillage immediate copious irrigation with tepid water and detergent may minimise the damage.

Salt and de-icing agents

As a general rule salt or other de-icing agents should never be used to remove snow or ice from the tennis court; their effect is unpredictable and they may cause serious damage.
Snow and ice should not prove harmful and can be allowed to melt through in due course. Powdery snow can be swept away using a wide soft broom or wooden scraper. Metal shovels or scrapers should not be used because they may damage the surface as will mechanical snow removing equipment.

The net and net posts

Do not over-tighten the tennis net. This will cause damage or even breakage of the steel cable and in severe cases may pull the net posts inwards, occasioning a very costly repair.

A common cause of the net being over-tightened is that the centre band is too short preventing the correct net height from being achieved. The centre band will usually be provided with a screw adjuster and this should be slackened to allow the net to be adjusted correctly and then carefully re-tightened.

The correct height for the net on the centre line is 3ft (0.914m). The traditional method of using two rackets to provide the correct measurement is no longer practical because of the diversity of modern rackets. A net measuring stick should be available at all times for this purpose.

The net should always be slackened after use to reduce strain on the equipment and to prevent lower temperatures at night causing the cable to contract and be stressed still further.

It is also a wise precaution to wrap the net over its headband to prevent the net being abraded by the surface as it blows in the wind.

If the court is not to be used during the winter, both the net and the net posts should be removed and stored, ensuring that they are first carefully dried.

The winding mechanism should be greased occasionally to ensure smooth and quiet operation and the posts checked for rust. It can also be helpful to lightly grease the post sockets and that part of the post that fits into the socket. This can greatly facilitate the removal of the posts especially if they are left in position for long periods.

Weeds

Before constructing the court, the installer will have applied a good, general weedkiller to the site, following the manufacturer's recommended coverage rates. This is usually effective but sometimes some weed growth may occur, either involving highly resistant species or windblown seed. It should not be automatically assumed that the weed-killing process has, therefore, been carried out inefficiently. It is simply that, in spite of all the wonders of modern science, there is no safe herbicide in existence that can be guaranteed to kill all weeds on tennis court sites prior to construction and to ensure that no subsequent growth will take place. Such weed growth that does occur usually represents a temporary inconvenience and only very rarely constitutes a significant threat to the court.

The extent to which weeds may constitute a nuisance will also depend very much on the type of surface and the location of the court. Weeds are virtually unheard of on porous concrete surfaces and are rare on impervious acrylic surfaces. Windblown seedlings can sometimes establish themselves in sand-filled artificial grass surfaces but usually wither away quite quickly. It is on bitumen-based surfaces, such as Gragreen or porous macadam, where troublesome weeds are most likely to be encountered.

Whilst weeds are unlikely to constitute a major problem, they will appear in a small number of cases, more especially in the year following the construction of the court. The secret is to deal with them promptly and not to allow them to become established.

Courts sited in fields, paddocks or other weedy areas or adjacent to suckering trees, may be at increased risk beyond the immediate post-construction period. This is because of tree roots giving rise to suckers and certain weeds, such as creeping thistle, can spread rapidly underground and may re-infest the tennis court site thereby. In these circumstances, it is advisable to maintain a weed-free "cordon sanitaire" around the perimeter of the court by applying a good, general weedkiller regularly to a strip of a minimum width of 600mm (2ft) immediately outside the court surround fence. This will check underground growth before it reaches the court.

Treating weeds

All grass, weeds, seedlings etc should be treated with a water-based systemic weedkiller (eg Roundup), thoroughly wetting the foliage of the weeds.
Such weedkillers work by being carried down to the roots of the plant and therefore are slow acting.
The weeds should be left in situ until the weedkiller has taken effect. Systemic weedkillers will only work very effectively on young, fast-growing weeds and will be less effective late in the summer when the weeds have hardened off and growth has slowed down.
Deep rooted weeds such as thistles, convolvulus, bindweed, mare's tail, etc may require further applications to be effective.

General Hints

Treat weeds as soon as they appear – do not let them become established.

When the weeds are dead they may be carefully removed. Great care should be taken not to disturb the surface of the court. A sharp, narrow-bladed knife may be useful for cutting off thick weed stems below the surface. If the weed has lifted the court surface, it should be carefully trodden down with the flat of the foot once the weed has died.

If very deep-rooted weeds persist in spite of the spot treatment described above, advice should be sought from either the installer or a specialist weedkilling company.