

Caring for Green Earth

Turf Care Equipment Rentals Offer a Bounty of Opportunity

By Linda Beattie

Schiller Grounds Care, Inc.

Studies have proven that maintaining green space is good for the ecosystem, the environment, and, the disposition. In the U.S. nearly 80% of all homes have a lawn and American's spend about 40 billion dollars annually to maintain or renovate them – this amount is expected to rise as the population matures. The influence of global warming and carbon footprint statistics aside, there are more practical reasons for the renewed interest in turf care. Well maintained turfgrass commands higher property values, conserves water and offers cooler surface temperatures – all of which are value-added reasons for the resident to maintain their property. Whether turf care services are hired out or performed by the resident, this renewed interest in turf care could really pay off for the rental dealer who carries a full line of turf care equipment.



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Getting the Most Out of the Line

The turf care equipment category, also known as “turf renovation”, is a niche line of dedicated power equipment that includes; aerators, dethatchers (also commonly known as “tuft rakes”), seeders/overseeders, sod cutters, and tillers. Turf care equipment has a reputation for being large and heavy – both attributes tend to make this equipment effective in what it does – at the same time, its size makes the equipment an attractive rental to the residential customer who has limited storage space for a seasonal product. Additionally, while demand for professional turf care services may be on the rise - credit is on the decline, making rental a more attractive and affordable option for the professional landscaper as well.

The value of turf care equipment to the customer is that these heavy-duty workhorse products make otherwise time-consuming and extremely labor-intensive turf renovation jobs quicker and easier with exceptional results. It's not easy to maintain a healthy lawn or to transform turf areas into a garden, patio, or trendy “staycation” spot. These tasks are often a multi-step process that may require several products within the turf care line to achieve. This makes the turf care equipment line rather unique in the power equipment industry as each unit is not only dedicated to performing a specific turf renovation task, but, in many cases, draws add-on rental revenue to other products within the line. Creating a moderate to large sized garden, for example, is a project that can be made considerably easier by renting both a sod cutter (to remove existing sod) and a tiller (to prepare the soil for planting). Adding lighting or sprinklers might require a sod cutter to lift the turf and a tiller to dig the furrow to lay wire or pipe. The sod is replaced upon completion and the lawn looks no worse for the wear. The need for turf care services like aerating, dethatching and overseeding tend to follow weather patterns and climate – these services are often dual-product rental opportunities. In consistently dry areas, overseeding and aeration would be used to allow the soil to retain and store water more effectively. In moisture-rich areas, dethatching coupled with aeration would be used to defend against water run-off and flooding. Good communication with the customer will aid you in determining the right equipment to suggest for the job.



Professionals often perform aeration and dethatching applications together.

Aerators



Core aeration is the process of pulling small plugs of soil, thatch and surface matter to improve natural soil aeration. The plugs decompose providing vital nutrients to the grass and root system.



Technically speaking, aeration is a naturally occurring process of air exchange between the soil and its surrounding atmosphere. Practically speaking, aeration is the act of opening the soil/soil surface, either by slicing or coring, exposing root systems to water, air, and nutrients. Slicing is an unobtrusive cutting/knifing into the soil. Coring is the process of pulling small plugs of matter/thatch and soil from the lawn to improve natural soil aeration. Slicing is done to reduce crusting by increasing water and air penetration into the soil. Coring essentially does the same, but extracts a plug of soil and organic buildup (thatch) that naturally decomposes providing beneficial nutrients to the grass and root system.

Benefits of Aeration

Aeration maintains or improves lawn health and reduces maintenance requirements through:

- Increased water and air movement into soil
- Reduced thatch buildup
- Better and deeper rooting
- More healthy turf resulting in:
 - Less water and fertilizer use
 - More aggressive growth
 - Better turfgrass performance during stressful periods
- Better soil conditions

When to Aerate

While most lawns benefit from annual aeration, understanding how often and the proper time to aerate turfgrass will aid you in maintaining stock within your fleet and marketing the benefits of the service to your customers. The number of aeration applications needed annually depends on the severity of soil compaction caused by weather or lawn traffic. Turfgrass with moderate traffic should be aerated at least twice per year. Heavy-traffic turf used for sports, golf and other outdoor recreation (as well as turf that is exposed to heavy or prolonged rainfall) should be aerated more often - three to four times in a season would offer the best results. For cool season turfgrass, both spring and fall are ideal times to aerate. Spring aeration is best performed between March and May. Aeration before or at the time of late season fertilization enhances root growth and improves spring green-up and growth. As such, look for fall aeration to be performed between August and November. Warm season turfgrasses will benefit best from aeration performed between June and September or after spring green-up and the first mowing of the season.

Dethatchers/Turf Rakes

By definition, thatch is a thick woven mat or shield. A roof is a good example of how thatch is used. Picture a straw hut. The roof is made of straw, but it is woven so tight that light, air and water can not penetrate. Lawn thatch does the same, shielding soil from necessary water, air and nutrients. Thatch is comprised of dead grass, roots and other organic matter. When the cycle of decomposition is delayed (for any variety of reasons) the matter collects - stacking up and weaving a layer of thatch. Thatch is very common and all turfgrass is subject to it. As thatch thickens it becomes spongy and soggy. This can become a breeding ground for a variety of nasty little pests including rodents and mosquitoes and can harbor disease. Thatch level will denote the treatment method required. A modest layer of thatch, ¼" - ½" thick, can easily be controlled by a dethatcher or powered-rake. A moderate level of thatch, ½" - 1" thick, can begin to cause soil compaction. Many professionals suggest using a two-step approach to thatch control at this level by including aeration into the practice for optimal, more immediate results. Left untreated, thatch can literally choke a lawn to death requiring more profound treatment. Sparse or bald areas can be reformed through a combination of overseeding and aeration. In the case of insect infestation or deceased turf, the lawn may need to be completely replaced requiring the sod and root system to be removed and replaced with either new seed or sod.



You can increase the revenue of a dethatcher rental by offering a unit with optional catcher bag for customer convenience.

When to Dethatch

As dethatching and aeration applications have become a common practice, many customers will want to dethatch on the same annual basis as they aerate. However, since dethatchers do not penetrate the ground, controlling modest levels of thatch through a dethatching-only application can be performed as needed at any time of year.

Removal of freshly lifted thatch can be incredibly time consuming. You should let your customers know that before they begin the project. You can increase the revenue of the rental by carrying a dethatcher with an optional catcher-bag attachment for customer convenience. This may not catch all of the thatch lifted in the process, but will greatly reduce clean-up time. For medium to large properties, suggest a lawn vacuum for the most quick and easy method of thatch clean-up.

Seeders/Overseeders

Seeding is the process of embedding seed into the soil at an appropriate, consistent depth. Seeding should be performed in a crisscross pattern to ensure complete coverage. Manual seeding is labor intensive and often provides disappointing results. For an easier and more rewarding seeding experience, a professional turf seeder is the most efficient and effective way to achieve a healthy lawn and rich, thick turf.



Dethatching first to remove matted thatch and then overseeding allows for the best possible penetration of seed and root establishment.

When to Seed

Starting a new lawn from seed is the least expensive and most commonly utilized method of establishing turf. Consistent depth, lay of seed, adequate moisture, and ground temperature are all crucial elements to the successful germination and establishment of new sod. The best time to start a new lawn or overseeding project is just prior to the turfgrasses season of most vigorous growth. In general, warm-season grasses should be planted in late spring when the ground is tepid. The mild temperature of the soil will allow the seed to get established and the balmy summer heat enhances growth. Cool-season grasses take best to late summer or early fall planting, as the ground will still be holding onto some summer warmth, which speeds germination. The later fall and winter months that follow will offer the seed a long cool season to become well established.

Overseeding

For established turf with bare, weakened, thinning areas caused by drought or traffic; overseeding is the best way to re-establish thick, healthy, more disease resistant turf. Professionals tend to dethatch and overseed at the same time. Dethatching first to remove any matted thatch. Doing both allows for the best possible penetration of seed and root establishment. If thatch is well established or the soil is balding due to compaction, an aeration application would also be required.

Sod Cutters

Sod cutters are one of the most profitable tools of the trade for residential and commercial property renovation. From adding a flowerbed to laying the foundation for a new home, sod cutters are used for residential and commercial jobs big and small. Because of its unique niche of uses, sod cutters are far more likely to be rented for a job then purchased outright and can be utilized throughout the year in areas where the ground does not freeze. By including sod cutters to your rental fleet you can really cash in.

Just a few reasons people rent a sod cutter:

- Add or reshape a flowerbed or garden
- Add a walkway, sidewalk or driveway
- Add tree rings
- Widen a driveway or sidewalk
- Add on a garage, sunroom, deck or patio
- Put in a swimming pool
- Replace dead areas of lawn
- Restore or define athletic fields
- Install and maintain underground sprinkler systems or irrigation lines
- Install and maintain underground wiring for low voltage lighting or invisible dog fences



From laying the foundation for a new home to cutting tree rings, sod cutters are used for residential and commercial jobs big and small.

Tillers

Gardening is one of the most popular outdoor hobbies worldwide. While creating and maintaining a garden is certainly a turf renovation project, the tiller isn't always considered part of the turf care line. However, make no mistake about what the tiller brings to the turf care table. When digging into the earth is necessary to perform a turf renovation task - the mighty tiller is the ideal tool for the job. The remarkable popularity of gardening, and the incredible labor intensiveness of preparing soil by hand, makes the tiller one of the most popular rental items in the power equipment industry offering one of the highest ROI ratios in rental. While the traditional purpose of a tiller is to prepare the soil for planting, tillers are rented for a variety of digging projects - from laying irrigation pipe, sprinklers or lighting wire to digging out stumps and fence posts.



Size Matters

The National Gardening Association recently released a study which reported that 31 percent, or an estimated 36 million, households in the U.S. took part in food gardening in 2008. The report also suggests that this number is expected to increase to 43 million households in 2009. That's an increase of 7 million households or 19 percent from 2008 to 2009. Demand for tiller rentals will certainly be up this season, but bigger is not always better when it comes to tiller rentals. Mid or rear tine tillers are popular rentals for preparing medium to large sized gardens. The interesting thing about food gardens is that it takes relatively little space to yield a hearty crop - thus the popularity of the handheld roto/mini tiller. Handheld tillers are ideally suited for smaller gardens, raised beds, and pathway landscapes. Handhelds are compact and light, making them easy to maneuver and control. Because handheld tillers tend to be narrow in size they also make the ideal weeding machine for any sized garden. Handheld units also tend to offer handy attachments that allow the unit to perform turf care tasks like aerating and dethatching. Just because an area is smaller in size doesn't mean that the quality of the turf is any less important to the customer. For the smaller property or niche area, the right aerator or dethatcher may just be a tiller with applicable attachment. Because of the high rate of annual tiller rentals, and stark contrast in size, weight, and capability within the tiller line, rental dealerships commonly offer a variety of tillers within their fleet to meet the needs of their customers.



For the smaller property or niche area, the right turf care tool may be a tiller with applicable attachment. Handheld tiller above, shown with dethatcher attachment.

When to Till

Tilling can be performed anytime the ground is not frozen. For preparing a garden, spring and fall are the most common times for tiller rental - discuss adding a plow attachment if available for customer convenience. For turf care services like aeration and dethatching, the traditional seasons for these applications would apply.

When it comes to power equipment rental, few lines can match the ROI and add-on rental sales of the turf care equipment line. From unit transport to job clean-up, there's money to be made in turf care equipment rental add-on services. When selecting turf care equipment to add to your fleet, consider quality over price - this will pay off in the long run. Commercial equipment, while a more expensive initial investment, is built for years of heavy-duty daily use and can withstand the riggers of rental season after season, year after year.

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