

As Easy as ABC



The Difference between Thatch and Mat

By Dan Prest, Askham Bryan College

Lying beneath the green stuff is a complex world. The dying bits in the soil would more than likely be called thatch, scarifying would probably be your solution. You may, without realising, also have a layer of mat. Do you realise that you will benefit from a touch of thatch and mat?

Thatch is found just above the soil surface and consists of undecomposed plant material. As this material decomposes it is possible that new plant life forms within the thatch layer. This means that rhizomes and stolons could be provided with a useful growing medium. A good amount of thatch would be around 12mm.

Too much thatch could mean that water and nutrients will not get to the roots below the thatch layer, this could cause

problems of growth, therefore increasing weed and pest invasion. There a number of ways to control thatch possibly scarification, but also hollow coring and topdressing.

Often confused with thatch is the mat layer. This layer is mixed with the soil surface. It can occur when soil is mixed into the thatch layer. Examples of this would include soil deposits in thatch by worms or topdressing with soil. Mat can be beneficial and is sometimes overlooked. It can provide protection in areas of heavy wear and can also stabilise turf from heavy activities.

Look for the thatch layer from the top of a core sample and it should be easily found (if present). Look for the Mat layer at the bottom and work up the sample with your finger and thumb until the soil layer is easily removed. The Mat layer can be found at the base of that grassed part intermingled with the remaining soil.

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Thatch at 5mm to 15mm

Mat at 15mm to around 25mm

25mm+ Rootzone

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