

Dear Monarch,

I noticed that sometimes the landscapers punch holes in the turf. Sometimes, dirt clods are left behind. Why do they do this?

Dear Concerned Resident,

TURF AERATION

What you are witnessing is called **aeration**. Turf grass grows vigorously and needs specialized care to keep it in tip-top condition. Aeration is one way we can facilitate healthy growth through horticultural practices.

- **Aeration** is accomplished by taking small cores a few inches deep in the soil. These cast-off cores are either pulverized or allowed to break down naturally. You may also see **verticutting** performed, which is vertically slicing through the top layer of turf and soil instead of puncturing. This is also called “vertical mowing” and meets the same goals as aerification.
- **Soil compaction** is a big concern for areas that endure significant foot traffic. Aerifying turf will help break up compacted soil, improving overall growing conditions and soil quality.
- Opening up soil will help with gas exchange and the absorption of **nutrients** and **water**. Compacted soil will not receive an even distribution of water and turf can begin to look patchy and unhealthy. Likewise, fertilizers will have less effect since they cannot evenly and effectively nourish their target. Both water and fertilizers are valuable resources that will go to waste without proper application.
- Breaking up old material is key in encouraging new growth. Dry, dead stems and other plant matter forms a layer we call **thatch** before it can fully decompose. While a light layer is helpful in retaining moisture and the nutrition from organic material, heavy thatch can become a barrier to growth and soil penetration. We want to foster fresh growth for lush turf, so helping to break up this layer can give new shoots a better chance. You may also see **dethatching**, which is a more intensive process of removing large amounts of thatch.

MONARCH TIP

Frequency of aeration, verticutting, and dethatching will vary with turf types, soil profiles, and growing conditions. Monarch can recommend the ideal schedule.