How To Get The Winning Edge

Expert Advice on How to Keep Your Turf / Dirt Edge Trim & Level

About Jim Reiner and Baseball Field Maintenance…

My name is Jim Reiner. I'm a sports turf manager and author / publisher of many articles and handbooks on sports field maintenance.

I developed the baseball field maintenance handbook, *Transforming Your Baseball Field into a Winning Field*, which was designed to help those who care for youth sports fields to get professional results with the least amount of time and cost.

My efforts -- both in groups and one-on-one -- transform ball fields to give your athletes the opportunity to perform at their highest levels.

I have completed projects from minor upgrades to major renovations for all levels of baseball and softball from T-Ball to College and everything in between. Prior to working in the corporate setting, I was a groundskeeper for the Texas Rangers AAA team.

A quality baseball experience is possible. I believe in giving back to make a difference for others. Creating great ball fields is just one way I invest in our youth and help create lifelong habits for success.

With this information, you not only have the power to create a great baseball experience… you have the power to make a difference. How about using that power… to make a difference?

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Jim Reiner, Groundskeeper, Publisher, Editor,
Author, *Transforming Your Baseball Field into a Winning Field*

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In this special report I’m going to show you why:

1. these edging techniques can improve the way you maintain your baseball fields and why

2. these tips can save you time and money while helping the athletes in your sports programs reach their fullest potential.
The Winning Turf Edge: Contents

1. Importance of a flat grass edge
2. Daily maintenance of the edge
3. Typical edging process
4. Edge repair: hosing, trench and roll, new sod, mass aerate and roll, & example project to reclaim the dirt build up
5. Marking edges
1. Importance Of A Flat Grass Edge

Maintaining a good, clean, level grass edge not only looks better, but it also:

- Prevents bad bounces,
- Prevents injuries like sprained ankles, twisted knees, and balls in the hands or face,
- And prevents embarrassment about your field.
A view of the grass edge.

Pros often edge once a week or at the start of each home series. They will use a stringer for a tight line. Sometimes if the crew person edging is very good, he will edge without a string. He will cut only ¼ in deep and maybe just a ¼ inch in.
Artificial turf field. Even the mound lip at the artificial turf must be managed by raking dirt off the turf and occasionally out from under it.
2. Daily maintenance of the edge

Hand rake the base cut outs. Keep the drags away from the edges… especially any drags pulled behind riding tractors. It is common for drivers to pull the drag over the corners creating a buildup.
This player is using a broom drag on the infield dirt after a game.

There are many good things about a broom drag: It is used at walking speed, can be controlled so as not to go over the grass edge, and is so wide that it only takes 4 passes to cover the entire infield dirt.
Edge and Lip Maintenance

Use a plastic rake to remove stray dirt from grass edge.

*However*, overzealous raking can result in a ledge forming… and then you skin the edge while mowing.
7 yards of baseball mix used to level the grass edges.
How the pros do it

The grounds crew takes the field within minutes of the end of the game.

Note that the first thing they work on is the grass edges.

The crew works to remove dirt clumps from the infield edges including around the mound and smooth out the base paths and home plate areas.
Clippings are not collected when mowing the outfield.

And note how the mowers have to turn around going back and forth over the grass edges.

The outfield turf is mowed every game day.
Backpack blowers are used for a variety of work.

Here a crew member is blowing grass clippings off where the mowers turn around.

Note: Blowers are sometimes also used to remove dirt from grass edges.
Grooming the infield skin.

Note in particular that the dirt near the grass edge is groomed by hand.
The nail drag for grooming the main part of the infield skin is kept away from the grass edge. The edge is hand raked.
Here's a close up view of the drag attachment and the coco mat drag behind. This is being used to drag the warning track.
Here the head groundskeeper is doing spiral or overlapping circles to groom the infield dirt.

Note he stays away from the grass edge.
The nail drag stays away from the turf edge. That area is hand raked. Note two crew members are pushing the rake with small teeth down. If you have a landscape rake with large teeth that dig in, then consider pushing it flat side down. It will make a big difference in smoothing out the field while not digging it up. Digging in loosens too much and causes dust and poor footing.
The crew continues to level the topdressing by pulling the flat part of the rake along the grass edge.
The smaller coco mat is perfect for a smooth finish on the infield dirt at the grass edge and next to the chalk line. Always pulling as you go.
Final touchup in around the batter box and along the first base foul line.

A broom is used in front of home plate. This area may be rolled once a week to compact it since this is where the ground ball begins.

This field has no lip at the grass edge. The crew member to the left is standing on the edge. It is perfectly flat.
Third inning of a game.
The crew quickly broom drags the field and touches up the first base area with rakes.
All equipment is kept off the grass edges.
This is a 1.5 ton roller used to roll the infield grass edges before home stands. It can also be used to keep the infield dirt firm.
3. Typical Edging Process

Using a gas powered, three wheel lawn edger
The stringer on the left shows exactly where the edge cut will be made with the edger.
Moving the string out 4 inches allows for using part of the edger that is 4 inches from the blade as a guide. See next pictures.
String stake has been moved 4 inches out and anchored back down tight.
A couple more views so you see exactly what we are doing to set up the string as a guide.

The cutting blade will be 4 inches left of the string. Don’t want to cut the string!
Here’s why the 4 inch string move.
Another view. I use something on the edger as a guide that is 4 inches to the right of the blade. You could use something else.
the cut after running the edger along the stringer
And, another cut after running the edger along the stringer
If you are not cutting much off the edge, then it is a simple matter of raking up the scraps you cut off.

However, if you have more than just a bit that you are cutting off, then you will need to remove it with more than a rake.

See next few on how this is done.
Gently is the key here. Don’t dig down or you create a ledge which is almost as bad as a lip. If you have to dig down, then follow up by moving dirt back close to the edge and level with the grass soil.
After pushing the hula hoe under the grass to remove
After raking the grass scraps you can tell if you need to rake some baseball dirt back near the edge to level it back out.
This field was rolled so it is perfectly level and flat. The edging process might make it look like the grass soil is higher, but it is not.
Once you get good at doing this and can push the edger straight you can weekly re-cut edge lines without the string.

Just follow the previous cut.

Here’s an example. Good edge cut without a string.

Fast and easy.
Extra over seeding at edges in the fall for cleaner cuts in spring.
4. Edge Repair Methods

This section shows you several methods for maintaining and repairing neglected turf / dirt edges.

1. Using water to blast out mild dirt build up
2. The ‘trench & roll’ method
3. Using seed and sod
4. Major sod cutter work to remove and reclaim dirt
5. Mass aerate and roll
Using water to remove minor lip buildup at the grass edge
Using water is a good way to blast out minor lip build up at the grass edge.

This is something to be careful with even when using a hose with normal field water pressure.

Too much can damage or disintegrate your grass at the edge. The roots can only take so much with this.
Hose blasting is a good way to remove lip build up - maybe a fourth to half inch at a time.

More than that and you stress the grass.

So, you can do this once a week for three weeks and get it down.
Trench and roll method

The ‘Trench and Roll’ method to flatten minor lip build up at the grass edge

Dig a small trench next to the edge. Make it about three inches deep and wide.
As you can see, there is a minor lip build up that is more than I’d want to try to blast out with water.

So, this trench and roll process is perfect solution for flattening these edges.
Roll the turf to flatten the edge out toward the trench.

Flat & ready to edge.
Rolling the turf, edges, and dirt so it is all nice and flat and level.
Here is a good view of the field after rolling it all.

Rolling does compact soil, so we will core aerate next.
Repair Turf Edges - Seed, Sod, or Fill With Sand or Dirt?

• My experience is that new sod can take three to six weeks for the roots to set before you play on it. Could be less, but rarely.

• If cost is a factor, you can also put out sand/compost on the missing areas and seed it to repair turf edges. Roll, mulch, and water regularly as needed.

• You can over seed in the fall/winter with a cool season perennial rye. This is a way to get some green grass growing in a couple weeks.

• Sod might be the best if you can get it. New sod may not match the color of your existing turf. But over time as you fertilize it will blend in. You can fix turf edges with seed or sod.
Here is a baseball field with very ratty and thin grass edges.

18” of sod as well as some seed helped restore this field.

3 weeks later
This is a an example of rebuilding the middle of an infield including rebuilding the mound and using sod for a better finished product.

This is a rye/blue grass field in a coastal area.
The middle infield was scraped flat with a small tractor with a smooth bucket. A new mound was built and then sod and seed were used to establish new turf. College play resumed 3 weeks later.
Example of sod used to improve the edges of a Bermuda college baseball field. Color will blend over time.
Example of a major edging project with a sod cutter and reclaiming the baseball dirt

First a sod cutter was used to cut back encroaching grass and get out the wide dirt hump that had formed.
At this field, most of the dirt hump at the edge was just a lot of baseball dirt that had accumulated from:

1. Dragging too fast,
2. Dragging over the edges,
3. Raking sideways on the base paths.
A look at the tools used to clean up this field.
You can see that the grass level is an inch or two higher than the dirt once the cut has been made. We will reclaim the dirt to level this out.

**Note:** be sure you know where you sprinklers are so you don’t chop them.
Another view to see the extent of the sod cutting.
The edges have been all cut. The sod chunks are spread all over the infield. This is done to reclaim the baseball dirt under the sod rather than just throwing the sod away.
This reclaims the baseball dirt from the sod cut out.

This job reclaimed almost 2 yards of good dirt to level the base path and edges.

By running a screen drag over the sod chunks the dirt was knocked off.

This took about 6 passes back and forth over it all.
Another view after about 30 minutes of dragging. Lots of loose dirt. Not many sod chunks left.
The weight on the screen drag helped break up the sod chunks. You don’t want the sod chunks stacked when you do this. You want them spread out.
Now we just pick up the remaining grass after the dirt has been knocked off.
Base paths are cleaned up. The extra dirt from dragging the sod has been added and raked. It is close to level now.
Finished! The turf is trimmed. The dirt causing the humps is reclaimed and used to level the field. Some more water and dragging will give this a nice finish.
Mass Aerate and Roll method to reduce wider humps

Core aerate back and forth, remove the cores, aerate it again, remove the cores, even aerate it one more time, then roll the area to flatten it.
5. Example of marking cut lines

This is one way to mark the cut if you have more than just a little to remove.

Run a stringer where you want your finished edge.

Then paint next to the string to indicate where to cut.

Note the sprinkler flag is placed on the side of the sprinkler nearest the dirt. That way you know exactly where the sprinkler is.
A closer look at placement of the sprinkler flag.

Do it consistently the same so you know where the sprinkler is.

I have learned that by putting it on the side closest to the dirt, I never hit it with the sod cutter or the edger.
A can of striping paint or field marking paint is used. These are the kind of paint cans that spray only when held upside down. That’s the kind you want to use to walk the string and spray as you go.
Depending on the base path width you want, measure at both ends so you get not only a straight line, but a line parallel with the foul line you chalk.

You don’t want your straight grass edge to not parallel the chalk line.
Here’s an example where the edge wasn’t too bad.

First the edge line was painted.

Then a flat shovel was used to cut the turf at the line.

Next, the flat shovel slid along the line under the grass.

Then it was raked back.

The end result is a pretty decent line. You can follow up later with a three wheel gas powered edger if needed for a more exact edge.
And one more example of measuring, spraying the cut lines, and then using a shovel to get a better path. Note it is not perfect. There is some grass missing on the left that makes it impossible to get a perfectly balanced cut. But this is way better than what it started as.
I hope you enjoyed winning baseball field turf edge management. As you can see, quite a lot can go into it.

And in addition to having flat, clean edges you prevent the number one cause of bad bounces, player injuries, and lost baseball games.
The Take Away For You

What can you apply from this?
Consider the following:

– Manage your grass edges to prevent lips
– Be consistent with preparation and clean up
– Hand rake or drag dirt near the grass edge
– Remove dirt build up regularly to prevent bigger problems
– Involve others with guidance to help you
For more tips and techniques managing your baseball and softball fields, visit: