# Reviving British garden sports with a vintage croquet lawn and push mower



At last year’s Austwick Cuckoo Festival, I stumbled upon a charming croquet set at a bric-a-brac stall for just a fiver. The elegant Franklin Professional set, complete with all its parts except for one mallet needing repair, calls back memories of summer evenings spent at Oxford, where I embraced the time-honoured clichés of student life through picnics on the river, outdoor theatre, and fiercely competitive croquet matches. Though North Yorkshire may not boast Oxford's signature warm evenings, this month's uncharacteristically fine weather has rekindled the belief that we can revel in sunny days.

With this croquet set in mind, I have decided to cultivate a sporting lawn in my front garden—not merely for croquet, but also for badminton and possibly bowls. Badminton, once popular among England’s aristocracy, has sadly fallen out of favour as a lawn sport in recent years. A notable painting in the Tate, “The Badminton Game” by David Inshaw, captures the essence of the sport with players in long dresses and impractical footwear, though my lawn, adorned with amateurishly pruned roses and perhaps a few sheep roaming nearby, is a far cry from that genteel scene.

Transforming my front lawn from a wilderness into a competitive space for croquet and badminton began with significant groundwork. Removing a path to nowhere has revealed a flat-ish rectangle of 45ft x 36ft, bordered by a ha-ha that adds an entertaining hazard to the game. This expansive area is perfect, offering enough space to adhere to the regulations of a croquet lawn while allowing for various other sports.

Of course, the groundwork was no easy task. My efforts to reclaim the land from the invasive bramble, thistle, and nettle left behind by my pigs, Hazel and Acorn, turned the backyard into an untidy battleground. The ground was littered with rocks and clods that required relentless digging, raking, and levelling. Indeed, digging through this landscape has been akin to Hercules' toil, yet my efforts have yielded delightful treasures—a collection that includes a silver spoon and antiquated coins—each find celebrated as "treasure" amidst the strenuous work.

Guided by my father's 1975 edition of the Reader’s Digest Illustrated Guide to Gardening, I’ve chosen to cultivate a 'Utility Lawn.' This selection is robust enough to withstand physical play and neglect yet aesthetically pleasing. A mix of Chewing’s Fescue, rye, Crested dog’s tail, and Rough stalk meadow grass will hopefully create a resilient surface, perfect for sporting activities.

Before sowing, the preparation of the surface required meticulous attention. Leveling the ground has involved knocking in wooden pegs, using a spirit level and string lines, followed by the addition of fresh topsoil. The final stages involve fertilising, sowing, and desperately hoping for rain. Maintaining a lawn fit for croquet means adhering to specific regulation standards, including mowing grass to a precise 5mm.

Lawn care tools have taken on a central role in my journey. My trusted vintage 1970s Ransomes push mower not only epitomises sustainability but also reflects a growing trend among gardeners who prefer petrol-free solutions. Ransomes has a storied history, dating back to 1789 when Robert Ransome created the world’s first lawn mower in 1832. The company has been synonymous with quality and craftsmanship, producing mowers designed for both commercial and domestic use.

Push mowers are appreciating in popularity, embraced for their indestructibility and nostalgic charm. The rhythmic whirr of the blades cuts through the air, transporting me back to my childhood when I listened to my father's mower thrumming in the garden. Gardening thus evolves from mere toil into a satisfying blend of nostalgia, fitness, and pleasure, offering an antidote to modern life’s sedentary tendencies.

In crafting this lawn for croquet, I am not only resurrecting old joys; I am also reflecting on the deep-rooted traditions of British garden sports. As the sun sets and the garden transforms into a vibrant hub for croquet and other lawn games, I’ll be reminded that the effort to restore is as much about the journey as it is about the destination. This is a labour of love, a revival of sport, and a celebration of the very essence of life outdoors.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3
2. Paragraphs 4, 5
3. Paragraph 6
4. Paragraph 7
5. Paragraph 8
6. Paragraph 9
7. Paragraph 10
8. Paragraph 11

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.ft.com/content/5b24ccca-f3ca-4091-9f8a-e720dc86744e> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/5b24ccca-f3ca-4091-9f8a-e720dc86744e> - In this personal gardening diary, Patrick Grant recounts his effort to transform an overgrown North Yorkshire front garden into a functional sports lawn suitable for croquet, badminton, and bowls. Inspired by memories of playing croquet during his university days at Oxford, Grant sets out to reclaim his lawn from the damage inflicted by pigs Hazel and Acorn, who rooted through the land, leaving it uneven and littered with bramble and rocks. After extensive manual labor, including digging, raking, and leveling the soil with wooden pegs and a spirit level, Grant prepares the lawn according to guidance from a 1975 edition of the Reader’s Digest gardening guide. He opts for a resilient "Utility Lawn" mix of grasses and aims for a low-maintenance, robust surface. A vintage 1970s Ransomes push mower is his tool of choice, reflecting a broader preference for sustainable, petrol-free gardening. The project, though physically demanding, brings Grant joy and physical fitness. Through this endeavor, he captures not only the practical challenges of lawn restoration but also the nostalgic and aesthetic pleasure of British garden sports and traditional craftsmanship.
3. <https://www.ransomes.com/about-us/history> - Ransomes, founded by Robert Ransome in 1789, is an Ipswich-based turf care company known for producing the world's first lawn mower in 1832. The company has a rich history of innovation in lawn care equipment, including the development of the first petrol-driven lawn mower in 1902. Ransomes' equipment is trusted to maintain some of the world's most prestigious areas, such as royal palace lawns and monuments. The company continues to modernize and focus on green initiatives, ensuring quality and sustainability in its products.
4. <https://www.ransomes.com/about-us> - Ransomes is a leading manufacturer of turf care equipment, known for producing the world's first lawn mower in 1832. The company has a long history of innovation and quality, providing equipment trusted to maintain prestigious areas worldwide. Ransomes is committed to sustainability and green initiatives, ensuring that its products meet modern environmental standards while maintaining high performance.
5. <https://collection.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/objects/co39330/ransomes-lawn-mower-lawn-mower> - This 1929 Ransomes lawn mower, featuring a 20-inch cut and powered by a 3.5 h.p. Sturmey-Archer engine, is part of the Science Museum Group Collection. The mower exemplifies the engineering advancements in lawn care equipment during the early 20th century, showcasing Ransomes' commitment to quality and innovation in turf maintenance machinery.
6. <https://golfbusinessnews.com/news/corporate/ransomes-jacobsen-celebrates-185-years-of-mower-manufacturing-at-ipswich/> - Ransomes Jacobsen Ltd, a Textron Inc. company, celebrated 185 years of mower manufacturing in Ipswich. The company has a rich history of innovation, including the introduction of horse-drawn mowers in 1870 and the world's first petrol-driven lawn mower in 1902. Ransomes continues to lead in turf care equipment, supplying products to golf courses, local authorities, and sports clubs globally.
7. <https://investor.textron.com/news/news-releases/press-release-details/2007/Ransomes-Jacobsen-Celebrate-175-Years-of-Mower-Manufacturing-at-Ipswich/default.aspx> - In 2007, Ransomes Jacobsen Ltd, a Textron Inc. company, celebrated 175 years of mower production in Ipswich. The company began by producing the Ransomes Budding in 1832 and has since become a leading manufacturer of commercial mowers, supplying equipment to golf courses, local authorities, and sports clubs worldwide. Ransomes continues to innovate in turf care machinery, maintaining a legacy of quality and performance.