

# The Grippin Outdoor Rink

We start in October by mowing the grass, where we plan to build the ice, as short as we can get it. Rake all the grass clippings, dead grass and leaves so the area is as clean as possible. We call it "the carpet". We continue raking and keeping the area clean of leaves and sticks until the snow prevents this activity. Some years the snow comes early before we completely finish the job but this is okay. The idea is to get as much up as you can. The ice sets up better on a clean ground. It is important to never leave piles to be picked up later, always pick up what you rake. We use a big garbage pail. Rake, scope the leave and stuff in the pail with our hands and then dump it in the woods.

Once the cold weather has set in and it looks like it will stay for a while, usually January, we begin building the ice. Hopefully you have no frozen pile of leaves in your rink. We build our ice right on top of the frozen ground, without a liner and with or without snow. If there is snow, we pack some with our feet and shovel some off. You do not need snow but if is on the ground you must decide to shovel if off, or pack it down. It takes more time to pack it down but it is very hard to shovel the snow off the ground so you might decide to pack. You can pull a sled full of weights or kids around. We do a combination of both, incomplete shoveling, with packing. We like to play boot hockey with a tennis ball. This packs the snow and we have fun while doing it.

Once the snow is packed, spray on a layer of water. We build the ice in layers. We spray on our layers starting with a fine spray at first. Before continuing, I would like to talk about water sources and the size of rinks. First you need lots of water and if your rink is large, lots and lots of water. Our rink is 55 feet by 80 feet. We need lots and lots of water. We get most of our water from an outdoor creek that runs by the rink. We have a well at our house. I would not build the rink solely from our house water. We have a good deep well but I am afraid the strain on the pump would be too much. We resurface using our house water but there is a difference between ground water and outdoor water. Outdoor water is colder and sets up better than water from the well. I find well water good for resurfacing but not as good for build the ice off the ground and especially not as good when building on top of packed snow.

We have a 500 to 1,000 gallon hand made tank that we fill up from the creek. When the tank is full, we open a 2 inch valve at the bottom and spray a layer of water over the area. We use about 500 gallons for the early layers. We refill the tank and wait until the water is frozen before spraying on another layer. The time between layers all depends on the temperature. If it is very cold, in the single digits, we can put on a layer every hour or less. If it is in the teens or twenties, we put on a layer every two or three hours. The key is not to put on too much early, just get it wet, i.e. try not to have too much standing water. Early on, there are many holes were the water will escape. If you put on too much water, ice will

form on the top, the water will escape from the bottom, leaving a thin crunchy top. Fake ice is what my kids call it. You will always get some fake ice but over time, it will fix itself. You can speed up this process by filling in the fake ice areas with snow. In these early stages we play a lot of boot hockey. Some years we have so much fun playing boot hockey that I think we should stop here but we always continue and after about a week of layering, again much depends on the temperature, it is time to lace up the skates. The first few times the ice is a little rough and bumpy but skating on it and resurfacing it is the best way to get it smooth and hard.

Once you start skating on it you enter maintenance mode. Maintenance of the ice is different than building the ice. You do not need as much water but you still need to spend a lot of time. It is important to keep the ice free from snow and objects whenever possible. Nice thing about a rink sitting on the ground versus a pond is you can leave fallen snow on the ice for a while. With a pond you need to get the snow off right away before the ice cracks and water seeps through making the surface uneven. A rink on the ground will take more effort to build but maintenance is easier because for one, a rink will not crack and the only water you see is the water you put on. Still, you should get the snow off as soon as you can. You should always get the snow created from skating off as soon as you are finished. Snow that has been made by skating is dense and crystallized and may adhere to the ice creating bumps. All other objects should be removed when not using the rink, such as, pucks, nets, pieces of wood and leaves. All of these items will attract heat during the day and holes will be created in your ice, especially if the sun is out. The sun can be damaging but it can also do a nice resurface job for you if the ice is clear of all snow and objects.

We resurface by scraping the ice with a big metal push shovel. We start in the center and push to the outside banks. Scraping gets enough snow off before putting a layer of water down, however, early on after the first couple of times skating when the ice is not real flat we sweep using a big shop broom. This takes a little more time than scrapping but the swept snow fills in the little holes better and also get snow out of depressions that the scraper shovel can not get in. Try to resurface when it is not snowing. Definitely not when snowing hard.

For big to moderate snow storms we use a snow blower. A big time and back saver but remember, if you use the blower, scraped the snow the blower leaves on the ice off immediately, we call this chaff. If left, scrapping becomes very difficult as this chaff sticks to the ice. If you do not have access to a snow blower, shoveling is good exercise. I always say it builds character and hard wrist shots. We still shovel a lot. We shovel from the middle out pushing the snow to the closest bank and like the chaff left from the blower, never leave pieces of the ice surface part-way shoveled. Part-way shoveled snow can adhere to the ice and can become very hard to scrape off. It is better to shovel  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the ice completely then to shovel the whole area  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the way.