

HOW TO:

Remove moss



What is moss?

Mosses are small, flowerless plants that are commonly found in shady, damp areas. They need a moist atmosphere to survive and generally grow in clumps. Given the right conditions moss can be prolific and will attach to most external surfaces. The UK has around 1000 different species of moss which is the highest in Europe, largely due to the mild climate and frequent rainfall. Moss relies on damp conditions for reproduction because the male cells need to move via a film of water to reach the female cells for fertilisation. It produces a large amount of spores that germinate very quickly, so spread easily. Mosses are often found at the base of church buildings, in and near rainwater goods, and on roofs.

Why is moss a problem?

Moss can pose significant challenges for church buildings due to its ability to retain high levels of moisture. Over time, this moisture can gradually penetrate materials such as stone, brick, or mortar, potentially compromising their integrity. Moss also restricts ventilation, hindering the building's natural ability to 'breathe'. This is particularly problematic on roofs, where accumulated moss can be washed into gutters and downpipes during rainfall, leading to blockages and resulting in both internal and external damp issues.



What should I do?

It's OK to let moss grow in many places around the churchyard as long as it does not become a slip hazard nor cause damage to the buildings. Moss thrives in unpolluted places so in many ways it is a good sign of the level of biodiversity surrounding your church. However, if it starts to take hold on the church building or makes access routes slippery you will need to act. If the moss is on the roof, this is unlikely to be something volunteers can tackle, however, if it is more accessible, volunteers can remove the moss themselves. It's always better to remove moss before it spreads as a preventative measure.

CARRYING OUT MOSS REMOVAL

Step 1: Assess

Assess the environment where the moss is thriving. Is the area shady and surrounded by overhanging tree branches? Is there a source of water, for example, leaky rainwater goods? Is other vegetation growing nearby and creating a damp microenvironment in which moss will flourish?

Step 2: Tackle the issues causing moss growth

Can you create some light and cut back lower branches of trees? If water is leaking from downpipes and guttering, or the drainage system is blocked, then make repairs to stop the excess water feeding the moss growth. Remove any other vegetation that is growing close to the moss.

Step 3. When to remove moss

If you have been able to eliminate the issues causing the growth, then you should wait around 4 months to see if the moss has started to shrink. If there is clear evidence it is changing wait a further 2 months to allow it to wither. Natural die back is a slow process but provides a good starting point for complete removal and moss will come away from the surface more easily.

Step 4. Remove

When removing moss, the priority is to avoid spreading spores and to clean up thoroughly afterward.

In Dry Conditions: Moss tends to shrink and loosen naturally, making it easier to remove. Begin with a soft-bristled brush, using short, outward strokes to gently clear a small test area. If the moss detaches cleanly without damaging the surface, continue. For stubborn patches, lightly dampen the moss and use a round-headed gardening tool to ease it off. If resistance persists, soak the area with cool water and try again—never force removal, as this can damage masonry. Once cleared, sweep the area thoroughly and pour boiling water over the cleaned surface to help kill remaining spores.

In Wet Conditions: Moss is often easier to lift when saturated, but surfaces may be slippery, so take extra care. Start by soaking the moss with cool water if it isn't already saturated. Use a round-headed tool to gently lift the moss, followed by a medium-bristled brush to remove remnants. As with dry removal, finish by clearing all debris and applying boiling water to the area

HEALTH & SAFETY

As with any maintenance task always consider your personal safety and the safety of your team. Wear gloves, long sleeved clothing, sturdy footwear and safety goggles. When working with boiling water caution is paramount, walk slowly and stand back from splashes.

NOTE OF CAUTION

If you engage a contractor, please note that some use a jet wash combined with a chemical treatment. This is not appropriate for historic church buildings. Ensure you make this clear to any contractor you engage. Gentle moss removal is essential.

CONTACT

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