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Cut It High … Let It Lie

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Cut It High . . . Let It Lie

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Why bag your grass clippings?

During summer months, as much as 15 to 20 percent of residential waste can consist of grass clippings. Not only does this greatly increase the cost of waste disposal, but it also packs landfills with valuable organic materials that are 100 percent recyclable.

Now consider not bagging your grass clippings.

Gone are the hassles of stopping every few minutes to empty the mower bag, rake, and wrestle with expensive trash bags.

Grass clippings are primarily grass leaves that have been cut off by mowing. While commonly referred to as "yard waste," clippings provide two significant benefits when left on the lawn:

- They shade the soil surface thus helping to reduce moisture loss due to evaporation.
- Decomposing grass blades are a valuable source of plant nutrients such as nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium.

Up to 1/4 lb. of nitrogen is lost for every bag of grass clippings removed.

Grass clippings do not contribute to excessive thatch build-up.

Thatch is a layer of undecayed or partially decomposed organic matter that builds up between the soil surface and the actively growing green vegetation. A thatch layer will develop if organic matter is produced faster than it is decomposed by microorganisms. Lawn grasses tend to be more susceptible to insect, disease, and growth problems when a thatch layer exceeds 3/4 of an inch in depth.

Poor aeration, applications of excessive nitrogen, and infrequent mowing that generates long grass clipping contribute to thatch build-up.

Regular mowing with a sharp mower is essential for reducing the need to collect clippings. It is important to mow often enough so that no more than one-third (about one inch) of the vertical grass height is removed with each cutting.

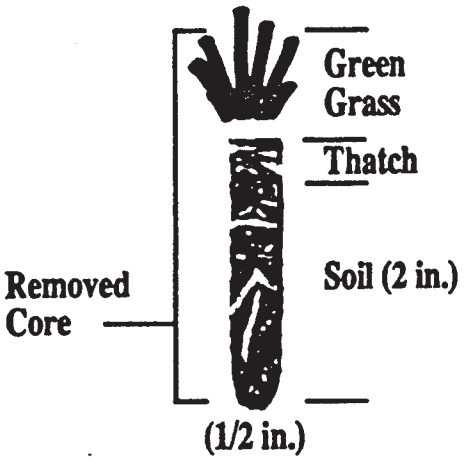
A mowing height between 2 1/2" to 4" is ideal. This height will allow your lawn to have a larger and deeper root system and to create a stronger defense against weeds and drought.

Leaving clippings on the lawn usually will mean having to mow more often during the few weeks of rapid growth. Mowing more frequently is not as much work as it may appear, because lawns mowed at the proper height cut much more easily and quickly.

Mowing infrequently damages the lawn by removing too much of the plant at one time. When mowed regularly, clippings filter down into the grass, decompose rapidly, and recycle nutrients back into the lawn.

If you think that your lawn does have a thatch problem, contact your local county Extension agent for assistance.

Aeration



Be careful about removing any bagging attachment on any mower.

Because many rotary-type mowers have bagging attachments that affect mower safety, it is essential to understand manufacturer's guidelines before considering removal of the bagging attachment. Consult your owner's manual or an authorized dealership for your mower about safety precautions related to removing the bagging attachment. In addition, some manufacturers have adapter or convertor kits which can be purchased to make the change from a bagging mower to a non-bagging type.

A "recycler" or "mulching" mower is a rotary mower that cuts clippings into small pieces and redistributes them uniformly back into the lawn for decomposition. Similar results also can be accomplished with a standard mower if proper mowing procedures are followed.

How should I fertilize?

Early summer and fall are the most important times to fertilize lawns. Applying fertilizer at these times can reduce the need for nitrogen in the spring. Nitrogen fertilizer products containing slowly available nitrogen will provide a more moderate, uniform grass growth rate. (Examples include sulfur-coated urea, urea formaldehyde, IBDU, or natural organic fertilizer.)

Why aerate my lawn?

Compacted soils and soils with poor drainage tend to accumulate thatch faster than well-drained soils. Aeration promotes better moisture and air penetration into compacted soils. It helps establish a deeper and healthier root system and stimulates the microbial activity necessary for decomposing the thatch layer.

To be effective, the aerifier must have hollow tines or spoons that bring the cores of soil to the surface. The best time for aeration is late summer, between August 25 and September 20, although aeration at other times of the year can be successful.

When using a lawn aerifier, go over the lawn several times in different directions to open up the compacted soil as much as possible.

Remember . . .

Proper lawn care not only can save you time and money, but it can conserve expensive space in landfills and help you maintain an attractive, healthy lawn.

Need more information?

If you have have questions concerning lawn management, contact your local county Extension agent.

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