

Lawn Care:

Grasscycle and Compost

Grasscycling is the easy practice of allowing grass clippings to drop back on the surface of the lawn after mowing. Once cut, grass clippings first dehydrate, and then decompose, quickly disappearing from view.

Facts about lawn clippings. The average lawn generates about 1,500 pounds of clippings per year. People bag their clippings because they believe grass clippings cause thatch. Grass clippings are beneficial to the turf, and do not cause thatch. Thatch is made of decay-resistant surface roots, runners and stems found close to the soil surface. They are not removed by mowing. The clippings contain approximately 4.0 percent nitrogen, .05 percent phosphorus and 2.0 percent potassium. Yard waste accounts for approximately 20 percent of all waste materials. Up to 25 percent of your lawn's total fertilizer needs can be supplied by clippings left on the lawn. Clippings contain 80 to 85 percent water and decompose quickly.

GRASSCYCLING ENCOURAGES A HEALTHIER LAWN

- Benefits the environment by naturally recycling the clippings and returning nutrients to the soil beneath the lawn.
- Reduces work because you do not have to bag or rake and dispose of your clippings.
- Saves you money because you do not have to pay for disposal of your clippings.
- Average mowing time can be reduced by 30 percent when grass clippings are not bagged.
- Besides saving time, you also save money by not having to purchase bags or pay for extra trash removal.

HOW TO BEGIN

- Proper mowing is required for successful grasscycling. Cut grass when it is dry and keep mower blades sharp. Dull mowers tear the grass blade, injure the plant, and cause a brownish cast to the turf.
- Following the "1/3 Rule:" mow your lawn often enough so that no more than 1/3 of the length of the grass blade is cut in anyone mowing. Frequent mowing will produce short clippings that will not cover up the grass surface. You may have to cut the lawn every 7 days when the lawn is growing fast but only every 7 to 14 days when the lawn is growing slowly.
- You can grasscycle with most any mower (push, electric or gas). The mower collection bag should be removed to allow clippings to drop on the lawn. However, if your mower does not have a safety flap covering the opening where the bag fits into the chute, it is important that you purchase a retrofit kit from your local retailer.
- If the grass gets too high, mow over the clippings a second time to further shred and scatter them. To prevent excess growth between mowing, raise the mower height, mow, then gradually lower it over a span of several mowings. This will help prevent shock to the plants. When it is time to replace your mower, consider mulching, recycling, or nonpolluting reel mower. All of them do a good job of shredding and scattering grass clippings.

USES FOR CLIPPINGS

Compost. Fresh clippings should compose no more than 1/3 of the compost pile. They are an excellent source of nitrogen. Mix thoroughly with “brown” materials such as leaves or straw and turn the pile regularly to aerate it and prevent odors.

Mulch. Pile about 1” of dried clippings on the soil to reduce weeds and moderate soil temperature. Mulching also controls erosion, run-off, and evaporation. If using herbicides, wait at least 2 mowings after treating the lawn to use the clippings.

Soil Additive. Mixing fresh grass clippings into the garden improves soil texture, promotes moisture retention, and adds nutrients and organic matter. About once a month, turn a 2” layer of grass into the soil to a depth of 6”.

TIMES WHEN GRASSCYCLING IS NOT APPROPRIATE

- Wet weather for prolonged time.
- Unable to mow due to mechanical issues, etc. lead to reduce mowing frequency and an excess of clippings.
- If this is the case, you can bag the clippings and use them in a compost pile. Limitations to this would be if grass is an invasive species like Bermuda grass or recently treated with herbicide.

NOTE: University Research indicated that grass clippings do not contribute to thatch. However, it is important to understand that if a thatch layer greater than ½ inch is already present, clippings can further speed its formation.



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