



RECYCLE... naturally

Grass- Cut It and Leave It

An Environmentally Friendly Lawn Care Program

Mowing

Proper mowing maintains a healthy lawn.

1. Grass height

Most New Jersey lawns thrive when mowed to about two to three inches. In hot weather taller grass shades the soil, cools roots and prevents weeds. Keep Kentucky bluegrass, fescues and ryegrass at three inches and Bermuda grass and zoysia at one inch. Remember: Never remove more than one-third of the lawn height when you mow.

2. Lawnmowers

You can buy several brands of mulching mowers. Just remove the collection bag. Beware: Always adhere to the manufacturer's instructions; some rear-bagging mowers aren't safe to operate without bags. Manufacturers also market attachment and/or mulching blades to improve performance.

3. Mower Blades

Sharpen your mower blade about once a month. A dull blade shreds and tears grass and turns tips brown. Also, cut grass when it's dry so it doesn't clog the mower.

Watering

Water effectively...not often. The average lawn consumes as much as 1,000 to 3,000 gallons of water each time you water it. Lawns tend to require less water and become drought resistant as you extend the length of time between applications. A lawn may turn brown during periods of infrequent rainfalls. But, remember that a brown lawn isn't dead...just dormant.

1. Watering Times

Water during the early morning or in the evening when less evaporation occurs.

2. Effective Watering

Shallow watering makes lawns susceptible to stress and disease. Always wet soil to a depth of four to six inches to thoroughly water roots. You can figure out how long it takes to water your soil to a depth of one inch by simply setting out tin cans and running your sprinkler for one hour. Measure the amount of water in the cans to determine how long it takes to fully soak grass roots.

3. Sprinkler Systems

Make sure your sprinkling system doesn't apply water faster than it can enter the soil. Caution: Sprinkler systems on time clocks should not be set to go on daily. And be sure to water only your lawn, not your driveway or sidewalk.

Fertilizing

Leaving the grass clippings along with proper fertilization, will enhance the health of your lawn.

1. Leave the Grass Clippings

Allow grass clippings to stay on the ground. Grass clippings returns nearly two pounds of valuable nitrogen to every 1,000 square feet of lawn each year. ***Lawn experts agree that lawn clippings do not create thatch. It's formed from the accumulation of dead grass roots and rhizomes of lawn grasses.***

2. Lime Application

Most New Jersey lawns are naturally acidic and require lime to neutralize the soil. A simple soil test will determine acidity degree. Soil kits are available through the Rutgers Cooperative Extension (609-265-5050). Apply lime according to soil test results. One application a year, especially in the fall or winter, is best for most lawns.

3. Proper Fertilization

Over fertilization weakens your lawn, causes excess top growth and can be harmful to surrounding environments. Do not fertilize a sunny lawn more than three times a year: in May, September and November. Skip May if you want to fertilize twice a year. Fertilize in either September or November if applying once a year. Two applications suffice for shady lawns. Remember: Fertilizing in the fall and/or winter will best benefit your lawn.

Bag labels show the amount of nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium (N-P-K ratio) in fertilizer. Most New Jersey lawns need both nitrogen and potassium. Use four times as much nitrogen as phosphorous and about two times as much nitrogen as potassium (examples: 16:4:8 or 20:5:10). For slow, even growth, use organic forms of nitrogen, such as fertilizers containing either sulfur-coated urea, urea-formaldehyde or methylene urea. Contact Rutgers Cooperative Extension for more information on this topic.

Excessive Growth

Consider the following options if excessive growth occurs between mowing.

1. Garden Mulch

Use grass clippings for mulch around gardens. One inch of clippings around plants will moderate soil temperature, reduce weed growth and retain soil moisture. Allow clippings to dry out before spreading.

2. Double Mowing

Double mow to prevent clumping. Adjust the mower height to remove only the top third. One or two days later adjust the mower to its regular height and mow again.

3. Compost Piles

Mix grass clippings with other organic materials in a backyard compost pile. Clippings should make up only one third of the compost pile.

Backyard Composting