



## GRASSCYCLING

Grasscycling (sometimes called mulching) is the natural recycling of grass by leaving clippings on the lawn while mowing. Grasscycling saves time and effort and when done properly, is good for the environment and the health of the grass.

### **Why do it?**

Grasscycling provides free fertilizer. Leaving grass clippings on your lawn can provide 15-20% of the lawn's fertilizer needs because grass clippings return nitrogen to the soil. It also eliminates the need to bag or rake grass clippings.

### **What about thatch buildup?**

Grass clippings don't cause thatch. Grass clippings (if not too long) decompose rapidly and are 80-85% water. A major cause of excess thatch is management practices. Overwatering and excess fertilizer reduces the population of soil organisms that decompose thatch. This can also cause plant material to build up more quickly than the microorganisms present can break it down. Good aeration, soil pH around 6.5, and adequate moisture, all help prevent thatch build up.

### **Proper mowing**

Remove only 1/3 of total grass height at one time. This means mowing every 5 to 7 days. Mowing too low stresses the grass plants and lowers turf quality. If you have to cut more than 1/3 of the grass blade in one mowing, bag the grass and add it to your compost bin, unless you have recently applied an herbicide (see the label for details). You can grass cycle with almost any lawn mower, simply by covering the chute where your collection bag sits. Several brands of mulching or recycling mowers are available and cut clippings smaller, leading to faster decomposition.

### **Guidelines for mowing heights**

Generally, you should cut your grass to a height of 2 to 2 ½ inches for lawns composed of Kentucky bluegrass, perennial ryegrass, fine fescue, tall fescue, or a combination of these grasses. Mowing to the proper height can reduce weeds and diseases by 50% to 80% in tall fescue. Leaving your lawn a little longer during hot weather can protect the grass roots and reduce drought and heat damage.

**Mow with a sharp blade and when lawn is dry**

Dull blades can give the lawn a ragged appearance and increase disease potential. Sharpen mower blades at the start of the season and again every 4-6 weeks. Also, change mowing direction each time you mow to avoid creating compacted ruts. Mowing when the lawn is wet will cause grass to cling to the mower and leave clumps on the turf, which either removes nutrients or slows decomposition of clippings or both.

**When to water is important**

Save water and money by watering your lawn in the early morning. The least amount of water will be lost to evaporation at that time. Avoid watering at night, especially if nearby plants stay wet overnight. An early morning watering schedule reduces disease problems and poor water distribution caused by wind.

Test your grass for proper hydration by walking across it, then turning around to look where you just walked. If you can still see your footprints in the grass (the grass is not springing back up into place) then the plants are drought stressed. Increase irrigation time in a small increment and test again at the same time of day. Repeat as needed until "footprinting" stops.