

Grasscycling

What is grasscycling? Grasscycling is simply putting your grass clippings back into the lawn to decompose naturally. Think of it as effortless composting. Grasscycling is probably the best method of lawn care. It not only protects the environment, but also produces a beautiful, healthy lawn.

Your lawn or any other plant is only as healthy as the soil supporting it. A good lawn needs to be well fed. Washington lawns need 4 pounds of nitrogen per 1000 square feet per year. This nitrogen can come from chemical fertilizers or natural lawn clippings. Fresh grass clippings are high in nitrogen. Grasscycling can provide up to 2 pounds of nitrogen per year, cutting the need for costly fertilizer in half. The clippings also add organic material to the soil, which improve soil texture and helps resist disease and pests. Unlike chemical fertilizers, clippings do not leach toxic chemicals into streams, protecting our salmon.

The first step to grasscycling is to know the proper way to mow. A sharp mower blade is a must! A dull blade rips the grass, leaving behind a ragged plant, more susceptible to browning, disease, and infestation. Have your mower blade sharpened at least once a year.

It's always best to cut the grass when it's dry. Wet grass cuts poorly, leaving behind clumps of clippings that stay on top of the lawn.

Do not remove more than 1/3 of growth at one time. Grass blades should be no less than 2 to 3" tall.

Remember that grass is a plant and like any plant it derives most of its nutrients from the sun. If too much of the blade is cut, the plant must draw its nutrients from the soil. Soon the soil is depleted and the grass suffers. Mow at least once a week and reverse the mowing direction every other time you mow. During heavy growing seasons you may need to mow the lawn every 4 to 5 days.

Contrary to popular belief, frequent mowing actually reduces the amount of time spent on lawn care. Frequent mowing grows thick crowns and deep roots and crowds out weeds. It's more disease and insect resistant. Taller blades mean a deeper root system.

In the spring, aeration is the single most important thing you can do for your lawn. It opens up the soil to allow water and nutrients to get deep into the root zone. Aerate once a year if your soil tends to compact easily, otherwise every couple of years. After aerating your lawn, topdress it with compost and water it in. The compost acts as a time-release fertilizer. Topdressed lawns use far less water when grasscycling is practiced, requiring far less fertilizer than do lawns not managed using these practices.

Clippings left on the lawn can increase the organic content of the soil and lead to increased earthworm activity. Earthworms improve soil aeration and water movement through the soil, providing a better environment for plant growth.

Grasscycling makes economic and ecological sense. It saves time, money and the resources needed to pick up and handle the clippings for composting or landfilling. We must stop thinking of grass clippings as garbage, and see them instead as effortless composting.

References

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