

Mowing is the key

Mowing is one of the most important aspects of lawn maintenance. But do you know how and when to mow?

How to mow

In our area, you should adjust your lawnmower so that it cuts the grass between 2.5 and 3.5 inches. Research at Univ. of Maryland has shown that it's the best height for lawns.

If the lawn is cut lower, it weakens the grass and tends to increase the amount of weeds. Because weeds usually grow faster than grass, you end up mowing more often!

On the other hand, if the lawn is cut higher than 3.5 inches, the grass tends to thin out, and weeds get the upper hand again.

To adjust the height of cut, just put your lawnmower on a hard surface like a sidewalk or driveway. Use a ruler to measure from the ground to the blade, and adjust each wheel so they're all the same height. And keep the blade sharp!

When to mow

Sometimes timing is everything... and timing is important when it comes to

mowing. Try to cut the grass before it gets over 5 inches tall. Many people make the mistake of waiting until the grass is over 8 inches tall before they mow. Then they end up bagging the clippings, raking, or (worst of all!) leaving ugly and lawn-killing piles of clippings.

But if you cut at the proper height, you can mow the lawn every day and never hurt it. And the more often you mow, the better it grows!

Clippings are valuable

Grass clippings contain many nutrients important to the health of the lawn and are beneficial in many ways.

Contrary to what you may have heard, grass clippings do not contribute to thatch (a layer of dead grass stems at the soil surface). In fact, the clippings are an important food for earthworms, which eat lawn thatch!

Mow and let the clippings lay!

If you mow on time, as the grass requires it, you might never have to rake clippings or bag and remove them. Raking is hard work, and bagging grass clippings in order to throw them away is often just a waste of time and resources!

Too many clippings

Maybe you've come home from vacation or just weren't able to cut the lawn for a long time. Sometimes, it's almost impossible to keep up with the lawn, and the urge to bag lawn clippings is just too great. So then what do you do?

1. Compost? Maybe it's time to begin your own compost pile. Go ahead, bag the clippings using only paper bags. Lawn clippings mixed with other yard waste such as tree leaves can make excellent compost. All you need is a little space, and nature does the rest.

2. Mulch? Many people find grass clippings to be an excellent substitute for bark mulch. Not only do the clippings decompose rapidly, they aren't eaten by termites, which can be a problem in beds with bark mulch. Every time you cut the grass, just add more of your grass mulch to the garden beds—two problems solved at once!

3. Paper bags? If you've ever used paper lawn bags, you know how useful they can be! Paper lawn bags are very strong and hold a lot of grass clippings—a lot more than plastic bags. They're also great for leaves, because you can compress so much more into them.

4. Plastic bags? Not a good choice, really. The City is phasing out its collection of grass clippings and other yard waste in plastic bags, because our City workers must remove the clippings from the plastic bags before they can be processed into SmartLeaf® compost at our Davis Hall composting facility.

If you must bag and remove the clippings from your yard, remember to use paper lawn bags. The paper lawn bags can be processed at Davis Hall without being emptied first. The paper just becomes part of the finished compost!

5. Rake or ignore piles left by mower?

Both are unpleasant choices, but one thing is certain- you should always avoid leaving thick piles of clippings, if possible. Thick piles of clippings can suffocate the grass underneath and lead to weed and disease problems.

Very often, the best way to deal with a lawn that's gotten out of control is to mow it twice. Mow much higher than normal the first time, and then come back in a day or two and cut it again at your normal height. That way, you can chop up the clippings left after the first mowing and put all of those valuable grass blades back to work on your lawn!

Tips for Easy Lawn Care

- ✓ Mow, don't wait! Mow your lawn before it gets over 6 inches tall.
- ✓ Always mow your lawn at the right height- anywhere from 2.5 inches to 3.5 inches tall.
- ✓ Leave the clippings- let 'em lay! Clippings are good for the lawn.
- ✓ It's best to fertilize in the fall (September - November). You can fertilize in early spring, too, but never fertilize in the summer.
- ✓ Stay off the lawn when it's very dry (during drought), and never mow when the grass has stopped growing because of drought.
- ✓ Water deeply and infrequently when necessary in the early morning (5 to 8 a.m.). It's best to add 1" of water, or about 600 gallons per 1,000 sq. feet of lawn.

SmartLeaf® Compost is a good mulch and great for starting a compost pile. Call our Public Works Department at 301-474-4194 for information!

Grass Clippings

... Let 'Em Lay!



Your Guide To Easier Lawn Care



This brochure was prepared for College Park residents as a volunteer project of the Committee For A Better Environment (CBE) in cooperation with the Univ. of Maryland Turfgrass Research Facility in College Park.

For information about CBE and our activities, please visit www.ci.college-park.md.us or call the City Clerk at 301-864-8666.