

Mowing

“Mow high and often” is a good rule of thumb, but cut only when the grass actually needs it. Avoid shocking the plants; never cut off more than a third of the blade length. Your recommended grass height will vary according to type. The University of Maryland Cooperative Extension Service makes the following recommendations for varieties in Maryland:

Grass Type	Mower Setting	Mow at or Before
Kentucky Bluegrass	3.0"	4.0"
Tall and Fine Fescues	3.0"	4.0"
Perennial Ryegrass	3.0"	4.0"
Zoysia Grass	.5 - 1.5"	1.5"

Keeping to these recommendations will likely mean that you will be mowing more frequently, making cuts every five to six days, rather than just once a week on the weekend. Surprisingly, a study conducted in Fort Worth, Texas, revealed that despite the additional mowing, people actually save time by grasscycling because they are not having to stop and bag the clippings.

Taller grass plants offer a greater leaf surface for food production, reducing the need for fertilizer. The extra shade produced helps prevent weed seed germination and also keeps the soil surface cooler, thereby reducing water evaporation.

Mowing Tips:

- ✓ Mow only when the grass is dry. Wet grass cuts poorly, clumps, and spreads diseases more easily.
- ✓ A sharp blade is a must. Dull blades rip and tear grass, encouraging disease and browning of your lawn.

What kind of mower?

Any lawnmower can grasscycle. All you need to do is remove the bag! Mulching mowers differ from conventional ones in that the blades and decks of these mowers are designed to cut clippings into smaller pieces before they fall back down into the lawn. Adapter kits with mulching blades may be used if you wish to convert a conventional mower.

If the size of your lawn allows it, consider using an old-fashioned reel mower. The modern versions are not as heavy as their predecessors and are easy to use. There are several benefits to using reel mowers: they do not cause air or noise pollution, their light weight helps prevent soil compaction, and they provide you with good exercise!



Your Complete Guide to Lawn Care

Cut it High & Let it Lie - Grasscycle!



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Fertilizing

In general, one or two fertilizer applications per year are sufficient for promoting a vigorous lawn. Timing is important, and depends somewhat on the grass varieties that your lawn includes. Northern grass varieties tend to do better with a fall fertilization, while Southern types may benefit from an additional spring application.

Never fertilize during the growing season; your goal is to provide your lawn with the nutrients it needs, not to produce taller grass for you to cut.

Fall fertilization encourages root growth that will help plants to survive summer dry spells. Because cooler temperatures slow down the amount of foliage growth, nutrients store up in the lower parts of the grass plant.

Spring fertilization is not recommended for cool season grasses, like blue grass and tall fescue, unless you missed the fall fertilization period, have thin, weak turf or you are seeding or sodding a new area.

Select a slow-release fertilizer. Grass plants take in nutrients slowly. Adding too many nutrients at once simply means that some of them are wasted because they are never absorbed. Thus, slow-release fertilizer cuts down on groundwater contamination because nutrient run-off from the soil is reduced. Water insoluble nitrogen is recommended because it is not washed out of the soil. Use slow-release or organic nutrient sources such as composted manure, urea-formaldehyde, or methylene urea.

The grass clippings that you leave on your lawn when you grasscycle are a good source of nitrogen and can reduce the amount of nitrogen fertilizer needed annually by about one pound per 1000 sq. ft. Unlike chemical fertilizers, clippings also contain smaller micronutrients that the plants need.

Aerating

Your lawn should be aerated once every 2 to 3 years. Aeration involves punching plugs of grass and soil out of the lawn. The plugs then break down and serve as a topdressing, or slow-acting fertilizer.

The openings created in the lawn allow oxygen, organic matter, and water to get into the soil. The oxygen enhances earthworm and microbial activity and root development. This movement, along with the act of removing the plugs, helps fight soil compaction. Microorganisms more actively break down organic matter on the lawn, including thatch and clippings. This in turn makes more nutrients available to the grass.

Thatch

A modest thatch layer is both natural and beneficial to lawn health, acting as a shock absorber for lawn traffic to prevent soil compaction and as a mulch layer to conserve moisture. Thatch is made up of grass roots and runners. Harmful, excessive thatch development (more than 1/2 inch) arises from short, frequent watering which encourages root systems to remain shallow and to remain where the moisture is. Frequent applications of quick-release fertilizers used by many commercial lawn care services can also lead to excessive thatch development.

Watering

Water your lawn only when the grass approaches its “wilt point.” At this point, grass blades take a few minutes to straighten up after being walked on, leaving footprints. A loss of color, to blue-grey or blue-green, can occur also. Give the lawn a thorough watering, not a daily sprinkle, allowing water to sink well into the soil surface. The goal is to wet the top 4 to 6 inches of soil, which is approximately the depth of the root system. This is another way to encourage deep root growth, which allows grass to make maximal use of the water you are giving it. Shallow watering yields shallow roots, which are less able to withstand extreme temperatures in winter and summer, drought, soil compaction, and disease. Shallow watering also contributes to germination of weed seeds.

Watering Tips:

- ✓ Water during the cooler parts of the day, such as the early morning or late afternoon, to reduce water loss due to evaporation. Avoid watering too late in the day, when the grass is unable to dry off. Damp grass invites diseases.
- ✓ Stay off the grass while the lawn is wet. Wet soil compacts more easily, and grass does not grow well in compacted soil.
- ✓ Make sure the water is sinking in, and not running off. How much and how long you water depends on the soil texture and structure. Many of us have clay soils, meaning that water infiltrates more slowly. This can also happen if there is a thick thatch layer or a “hard pan.” Move the sprinkler around to let water soak in, repeating until water penetration of 4 to 6 inches is achieved. You can monitor your progress by probing the soil with a screwdriver.

Weeds

Having a healthy lawn is the first step toward combating weeds, but even the best lawn will contain a few weeds. Also, the higher blade height shades light out which may otherwise encourage weed seeds to sprout.

Try getting rid of weeds by pulling them and mowing them over. For example, attack dandelion plants at their weakest time, which is while they are blooming. By grasscycling, it is very likely that you will be doing this automatically, because by mowing every few days, you should catch the blooms before they go to seed. If at the

time you are able to remove 4 to 5 inches of root, you greatly reduce the chance that the plant will regenerate.

In a similar way, healthy lawns require fewer fungicide and pesticide applications. Naturally occurring microorganisms fight pests well. Instead of reaching for chemicals, monitor insect and fungus levels and the effects they are having on your lawn. Only intervene when damage begins to occur. Treat the problem areas with natural controls, which can be biological or physical.