



Make good use of grass clippings when mowing

With the rain much of Oklahoma has experienced lately, it's not surprising that the grass in landscapes across the state is literally "growing like weeds." This results in homeowners needing to mow their lawns regularly.

Oftentimes, homeowners believe that grass clippings need to be removed in order to have a healthy, vigorous lawn. They think grass clippings cause thatch, a layer of undecomposed or partially decomposed grass and roots that build up between the soil surface and the growing turf. However, that's not the case. In fact, leaving the grass clippings on the lawn is a good thing. Grass clippings contain 80% to 85% water and decompose faster than other grass plant parts.

Returning the clippings to the lawn will typically mean mowing more than once a week during the time of rapid growth. Although it may sound daunting, it really isn't much more work. Lawns mowed at the proper height cut more easily and quickly. Putting off the mowing chores can lead to more work and can damage the lawn by removing too much of the plant at one time.

Mower deck height is something else to consider and will depend on the type of turfgrass in the landscape. Setting the mower at a tall setting makes it easier for the clippings to fall easily into the lawn. Cut the lawn a little longer in the heat of the summer to protect the grass from scorching.

Mulching mowers do a great job of working grass clippings into the canopy of the lawn. The design of the blade on a mulching mower chops clippings and speeds their decomposition.

Mulching the grass while mowing helps control weeds, conserves soil moisture, reduces soil erosion, improves water penetration into the soil, protects against extreme heat and cold and, over time, increases organic matter in the soil.

Clippings should be distributed uniformly across the area rather than being dumped in clumps. To help achieve this, mow the lawn when the grass is dry. Make sure the mower blades are sharp as this will help spread clippings evenly. A dull mower blade increases injury to the grass and can give the lawn an unsightly brown appearance.

For those who bag grass clippings, don't simply toss the bags into the trash. Take the bagged clippings and reuse them as mulch around plants, flowers, fruits, and vegetables; however, don't mulch with clippings from a lawn that has been treated with a weed control product within the last two weeks. The herbicide on the clippings can harm desirable bedding and garden plants. These clippings are best left on the lawn where the clippings and herbicide are broken down naturally by soil microbes and earthworms.

The clippings are also good for composting because of their relatively high nitrogen content. They can't be composted alone due to their tendency to mat. A thick layer of grass clippings can produce a foul odor because of the lack of oxygen. Don't use more than 3 to 4 inches of clippings at a time. Mix them with materials containing carbon, such as leaves or sawdust.

Grass clippings are free and a great way to add organic material back into the landscape.

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