

Facts About Grass Clippings

- Yard waste can account for 20% of the solid waste in landfills, and up to 50% of all yard waste is grass clippings. Grass clippings are recyclable and do not need to take up valuable landfill space.
- Using grass clippings as a source of fertilizer for your lawn can save time, money and help protect the environment.
- Leaving grass clippings on your lawn can generate up to 25% of the lawn's yearly fertilizer needs and reduce the amount of time and money you spend fertilizing and bagging. Lawns stay greener and healthier when clippings are left on them.
- Grass clippings don't cause thatch.
- Thatch is caused by excessive growth from over-fertilizing, by allowing grass to get too high before mowing, or by incorrect watering. Too much thatch leads to uneven mowing, scalping, and drought stress.

Grass Recycling Saves Lawn Care Costs

- Fertilizer – Grass clippings can supply up to one-third of a lawn's nitrogen fertilizer needs.
- Time – Recent trials confirmed leaving grass clippings on the lawn saves one-third of the mowing time.
- Water use – Clippings shade grass roots, cool the soil, return moisture, add moisture holding organic matter, and thereby reduce lawn watering needs.
- Soil health – Clippings decompose rapidly, feeding soil organisms that keep soil healthy and help prevent turf diseases.
- Thatch – Studies prove grass clippings do not cause thatch build-up. (DJ)

The Truth About Thatch

Thatch consists of a tightly intermingled layer of dead and decaying turfgrass tissues derived from stems, roots, and leaves. Thatch has a high lignin content and resists microbial breakdown. Located between the green vegetation and soil surface, thatch accumulates when production of turfgrass organic matter exceeds decomposition.

Infrequent mowing of tall grass can contribute to thatch accumulation. The rule for mowing is to mow at a height and frequency so no more than one-third of the grass height is removed at any single mowing. For example, a lawn that grows to a 3-inch height can be cut back to a 2-inch height, leaving the 1-inch clippings to easily filter into the grass canopy. Grass clippings are not a

primary cause of thatch, and they should not be collected in an attempt to prevent thatch buildup. Leaf tissue readily breaks down in a lawn compared to the more stable crown and shoot tissue. Mulching-type mowers chop clippings into smaller pieces that easily filter into the grass canopy and decompose faster.

A small thatch layer (less than 1/2 inch) can be beneficial because it increases the turf's resiliency, improves its wear tolerance, and insulates it against soil temperature changes. When thatch layers exceed 1/2 inch, however, the disadvantages generally outweigh the advantages. The turf's susceptibility to heat, cold, and drought increase with excess thatch accumulation, and localized dry spots, scalping,

disease, and insects may become problems. As thatch accumulates, there is a tendency for root and rhizome growth to occur primarily in the thatch layer rather than in the soil. This results in a weakened, poorly rooted turf that is prone to stress injury and requires increased management.

Thatch can be removed by hand raking or by using a power rake. Hand raking is laborious and is practical only for small areas. Power rakes can be rented, or the service can be hired from a professional lawn care company. Power rakes use rigid wire tines or steel blades to lift thatch debris and a small amount of soil to the lawn surface. The soil should have some moisture for best results. (DJ)

Mulching Tree Leaves into Lawns

The state regulation that prohibits sending yard wastes to landfills has created a problem for grounds managers and homeowners who need to dispose of tree leaves each fall. One alternative is to compost the leaves, either on the premises or at a local composting center. The latter requires the expense of collection, bagging and a means of transport to a compost center. The former requires part of the landscape be devoted to the composting. When there are many trees on the grounds, leaf clean-up and composting can be a time-consuming chore. Another means of disposal is simply mowing the turf/tree leaves with a rotary mower often enough to pulverize the leaves so they fall into the turf.

It appears returning the leaves to the turf is not harmful to the grass if the mulching/mowing is done at appropriate times. When oak leaves are predominant, it will be necessary to mulch them into the turf later in the fall because they are held on the trees longer than most other trees. For best results, leave the mower set at the same height as you have been mowing the turf. It is

important to use a rotary mower that pulverizes the leaves well and that the leaves are dry when mowed. Sharpening the mower blades and a slow movement with the mower will help to grind the leaves finer. It may be necessary to make as many as three or four passes over the area to grind the leaves fine enough. The finer the leaf particles, the more easily they fall into the turf, leaving grass leaves exposed to the sunlight.

The pulverized leaves will settle into the turf within a day or two, particularly if followed by rain. Take care that the pulverized leaves do not cover the grass blades entirely. It is best if the tree leaves are "mowed" regularly, not allowing them to lie on the turf more than three or four days.

Fall is a very important time for the turf to photosynthesize and store carbohydrates, particularly under trees where the turf receives limited sunlight during the summer. It is suggested to add 1/2 pound nitrogen per 1,000 square feet in addition to the normal fall nitrogen fertilization to enhance decomposition of the tree leaves.

Mulching leaves into the turf is a reasonable means of disposing of the leaves. (DJ)



Turfgrass Cultivars for Nebraska

Kentucky Bluegrasses

Medium-High Input Cultivars (4 lb. N/1000 sq. ft., mowed at 0.5-2.5", irrigated to prevent drought stress):

Absolute, America, Arcadia, Award, Bartitia, Blacksburg, Blackstone, Brilliant, Conn I, Explorer, Impact, Liberator, Limousine, Midnight, Nuglade, Odyssey, Platini, Quantum Leap, Rambo, Rugby II, Serene, Shamrock, Total Eclipse, Unique

Low Input Cultivars (2 lb. N/1000 sq. ft., mowed at 3.0-3.5", minimal to no irrigation):

Baronie, Bartitia, Barsweet, Caliber, Cynthia, Canterbury, Haga, Midnight, Monopoly, Nustar, Ram I, Sophia, Unique

Turf-Type Tall Fescues

* Indicates cultivars with moderate to high resistance to brown patch disease.

Adobe, Advanti, Anthem*, Arid*, Austin*, Aztec*, Bullet, Crossfire, Coyote, Debutante, Empress, Guardian*, Gazelle, Hounddog V, Lancer, Lexus, Marksman, Monarch*, Petite, Phoenix, Pixie, Pyramid, Rebel Jr., Rebel 3D, Shortstop II, Silverado, Sunpro, Southern Choice, Tomahawk

Perennial Ryegrasses

Accent, Achiever, Assure, Blazer III, Brightstar II, Calypso II, Catalina, Chaparral, Cutter Divine, Derby, Supreme Elf, Esquire, Excel, Laredo, Line Drive, Majesty, Mardigras, Omega 3, Palmer III, Panther, Passport, Pennant II, Precision, Premier, Prizm, Repel III, Riviera II, Saturn II, Secretariat, Sonata, SpellBound, SR 4010, SR 4200, SR 4400, Sunshine, Top Hat, Wizard

Other Turfgrasses

Cool-Season Turfgrass Species:

Fine-Leaf Fescues

Brittany, Brigade, Discovery, Ecostar, Jasper, Nordic, Reliant II, Seabreeze, Tiffany

Creeping Bentgrasses (Putting Greens)

Backspin, Cato, Century, Crenshaw, Imperial, L-93, Penn A-1, Penn A-4, Penn G-6, Penncross, Pennlinks, Providence, Southshore, SR 1020

Creeping Bentgrasses (Fairways)

Penneagle, Southshore, Procup, Penncross
Rough Bluegrasses
Colt, Sabre

Warm-Season Turfgrass Species:

Buffalograsses

315, 378, Bison, Cody, Sharp's Improved, Tatonka, Texoka, Topgun

Zoysiagrasses

Meyer

Cultivar lists are not inclusive. Consumers should use them as guides. Use all available information before making a final selection of grasses best adapted for use in your situation.

Consult the "yellow pages" directory in your telephone book for local suppliers of seed and sod and for availability of specific cultivars. Use certified seed or sod for best results. Packaged seed mixtures and blends list the names of species and cultivars they contain. Read the label to be sure the package contains desired cultivars.

More detailed information on turfgrass species, cultivars and their adaptation is available from your local Cooperative Extension Office. (DJ)

