

# Grasscycling: An Ecologically and Financially Sound Program for Your Lawn

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*Leave grass clippings on the lawn. Grass clippings are 75% to 85% water. When you mow regularly, clippings quickly decompose and release nutrients to fertilize the lawn. **Grasscycling** is an ecologically and financially sound program for your lawn. Here are a few simple guidelines for mowing, fertilizing, and watering. If you follow these suggestions, you will no longer need to bag clippings, and your lawn will grow at an acceptable rate, retain a green color, and develop a deeper root system.*

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## Facts About Grass Clippings

**A new state law prohibits yard waste, including grass clippings, from being discarded in landfills (as of January 1, 1993).**

Yard waste can account for 20% of the solid waste in local 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. To deal with the solid waste crisis in North Carolina, all of us will have to make major changes in the way we handle yard waste. Contact the North Carolina Department of Environment, Health, and Natural Resources for more information about Senate Bill III.

**Using grass clippings as a source of fertilizer for your lawn can save time and 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 overfertilizing, by allowing grass to get too high before mowing, or by incorrect watering. Too much thatch leads to uneven mowing, scalping, and drought stress.

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## Mowing

Any mower that is in good working condition and has a sharp blade can be used in the grasscycling program. Mulching mowers may be better than traditional mowers for those who can not mow on a regular basis. These mowers tend to cut grass into finer pieces, allowing it to filter down among the standing plants. With either mower, best results can be expected if the lawn is dry.

### Basic Mowing Checklist

- **Mow at the appropriate height.**  
Refer to table for guidelines for mowing heights.

#### Guidelines for Mowing Heights

<u>Lawnglass</u>	<u>Height after mowing (inches)</u>
<b>Bermudagrass</b>	3/4 to 1
<b>Centipedegrass</b>	1
<b>St. Augustinegrass</b>	3 to 4
<b>Bahiagrass</b>	3 to 4
<b>Zoysiagrass</b>	3/4 to 1 1/2
<b>Tall Fescue</b>	2 1/2 to 3 1/2
<b>Kentucky Bluegrass</b>	1 1/2 to 2 1/2
<b>Fine Fescue</b>	1 1/2 to 2 1/2
<b>Perennial Ryegrass</b>	1 1/2 to 2 1/2

- **Mow with a sharp blade.**  
Dull blades can give the lawn a ragged appearance and increase disease problems.
- **Mow lawns when the grass is dry.**  
Mowing the lawn when the grass is dry will allow better distribution of the clippings and less chance of clogging the mower.
- **Mow regularly.**  
A basic rule is not to remove more than 1/3 of the growth at one time.

Occasionally, prolonged rains make it impossible to mow regularly. In these cases, raise the mower for the initial cutting and gradually lower the mower to the proper height. You can mow just once and recycle the longer clippings if:

- the clumps of grass are spread evenly over the lawn to allow them to disintegrate; or
- the clippings are allowed to dry for a day or two, then mowed again to distribute them evenly.

If you have not been able to mow for awhile and the quantity is too great to leave on the lawn, clippings can be used as mulch in tree and shrub beds.

Mowing frequency will vary with temperature, fertility, amount of moisture, season, and natural growth rate of the lawn.

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## Watering

### Basic Watering Checklist

- **Water your lawn in early morning.**  
Be kind to the environment and save water and money by watering your lawn in the early morning. The least water will be lost to evaporation at this time. An early morning watering schedule also reduces disease problems and poor water distribution caused by wind.
- **Give lawns grown on sandy soils 1/2 inch of water when irrigating. Lawns on heavy soils should receive 1 inch.**  
Measure irrigation water by placing a can or two on your lawn to catch the water. Compacted soils may take several shorter periods of irrigation to allow the water to be absorbed. Avoid surface runoff.

Sandy soils may require more frequent watering, for example, 1/2 inch every three days. Don't water fescue, bluegrass, or ryegrass lawns in the summer unless you plan to do so all season. Many of these types of lawns are lost by discontinuing irrigation in midsummer. Be consistent with your watering routine; your lawn can't go on vacation with you.

- **Don't water until you see first signs of wilt.**  
Wilted lawns have a blue-green appearance, leaf curl, or footprints that remain on the lawn. Look along sidewalks or roadside surfaces for first signs of wilt. Light, frequent waterings promote shallow roots and weaken turf.
- **Don't overwater.**  
This promotes diseases and excessive growth.

## Fertilizing

- **Fertilize according to recommendations.**  
Have your soil tested, and refer to the table below.

### Basic Fertilizing Schedule

Lawnglass	Pounds of Nitrogen per 1,000 sq. ft. per application*	When to Apply
Bahiagrass	1/2	May, July
Bermudagrass	1	May, June, July, August
Centipedegrass	1/2	May **
St. Augustinedgrass	1/2	May, June, July, August
Zoysiagrass	1/2	April, July, August
Fescue, Bluegrass	1	February, September, November

\* Use a complete balanced (N-P-K) fertilizer in which some of the nitrogen is slowly available. Fertilize centipedegrass using a low phosphorus, high potassium fertilizer.

\*\* An additional fertilization in August may enhance centipedegrass performance in coastal locations only.

- **Determine the amount of fertilizer needed.**  
Follow directions on the fertilizer label, or follow the procedure described below. Guard against overfertilization.

### How to Determine Fertilizer Requirements

To apply 1 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet--

100 divided by the first number on the fertilizer bag equals the amount of product to be used per 1,000 square feet.

**Example:** A 16-4-8 fertilizer. 100 divided by 16 equals 6.25. Therefore, 6.25 pounds of fertilizer per 1,000 square feet will deliver 1 pound of nitrogen.

To apply 1/2 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet--

50 divided by the first number on the fertilizer bag equals the amount of product to be used per 1,000 square feet.

**Example:** A 10-10-10 fertilizer. 50 divided by 10 equals 5. Therefore, 5

pounds of fertilizer per 1,000 square feet will deliver 1/2 pound of nitrogen.

- **Apply fertilizer when grass is dry.**

This prevents the foliage from being burned and allows the fertilizer to fall around the plants where it can be watered in.

**Remember,** if you still do not want to leave grass clippings on your lawn, compost them. Composted grass clippings, as well as other yard waste, can be used as a mulch or soil conditioner.

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