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B E T T E R T H A N B A G G I N '

GRASSCYCLING YOUR LAWN

F A C T S H E E T

Grasscycling or "mulching" means leaving your grass clippings on the lawn. There are many misconceptions concerning grasscycling; that it is bad for your lawn; that it causes thatch; that it is messy; etc. These outdated views are simple not true.

Grass clippings are 80-90% water, so they decompose quickly releasing valuable nutrients back into the soil. This makes them a natural fertilizer. Mulching mowers cut grass clippings into particles that are so fine you can't even see them on your lawn. These ultra fine grass particles decompose almost immediately, providing additional water to your lawn thereby reducing the amount of moisture loss from the sun.

The actual practice of grasscycling is simple: let the grass grow to three inches and cut 1" off the top. Most lawns are mowed too short and too often. If frequent and close mowing is combined with other stresses such as drought, insufficient nutrients, or unusually hot or cold spells, grass plants become smaller in size and less dense. The resulting thinning provides openings for undesirable weed species.

Continual cutting also creates wounds at the ends of grass blades, providing ports of entry for diseases such as leaf spot, rust, and dollar spot. In fact, at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's experimental lawn plots, it's standard practice to mow shorter and more often to incite lawn diseases for experiments.

Grasscycling not only benefits your lawn but is much simpler to do - just leave the clippings on your lawn.

Keep Your Blade Sharp: When grasscycling, it is important to make sure you have a sharp mower blade. A dull blade can shred the top of the grass blade causing your grass to turn brown.

The 3 Rule: Let your grass grow to 3 (inches) and cut 1 off the top. This is called the one third rule. Never cut more than one third off the grass blade. You may be mowing higher but it is better for your lawn. Longer grass helps develop a deeper root system, it holds more moisture and because of its longer length helps to shade out weeds.

Morning Watering: Experts recommend watering early in the morning. Evening watering can expose your grass to fungus or disease. Remember to water long enough to allow a deep soaking to the roots (wet the soil to a depth of six inches). Avoid daily, light sprinklings - they can do more harm than good.

Plant the Right Type of Grass: The three types of grass best suited to Southern Ontario are: Perennial Ryegrass, Fine Fescue, and Kentucky Bluegrass. Spread new seed every year, over seeding will result in a dense turf that can choke out weeds.

Use an Organic Fertilizer: Use an organic fertilizer like bone meal or blood meal. Organic fertilizers are low release fertilizers - they won't burn your lawn. Only fertilizer in the late Fall, and never in the Spring. Spring fertilizing leads to top growth - at a time when root growth is more important.

Aerate your Lawn in the Spring and Fall: Compacted soil stresses and kills the roots of your lawn grasses, allowing weeds to move in and take their place. Aerating your lawn allows oxygen to penetrate the soil, and will restore proper drainage. Wear your old golf shoes to mow your lawn!

Many bagging mowers can be retrofitted to "mulchers". Contact your local lawn care dealer for more information and prices.

Did you know..?

That grass clippings and leaves have accounted for 20% of waste being sent to local landfills each year.

Grass clippings in landfills can contribute to the formation of leachate and methane gas. In addition, the decomposition of grass clippings within a landfill can create an unstable environment.

In Essex County an average bag of grass weighs 11 kg.

40% of home owners in Essex County bag their grass.

Thatch is caused by shallow watering, over fertilization, and improper mowing - NOT BY MULCHING.

Grass clippings contain valuable nutrients such as nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium.