

## Grass: Cut-It-And-Leave-It

Grass clippings are a major part of Fair Lawn's solid waste stream (garbage & recycling). While recycling grass and yard waste is mandatory in New Jersey, it is costly to collect and transport to a composting facility. Recycling your own grass is easy and saves you, and the town, money each time you cut your grass. Use a mulching lawnmower or simply replace the blade on your existing mower with a mulching type. When you cut your grass, allow it to remain on the ground to be reabsorbed and provide vital nutrients to your grass.

You save:

- Time by not bagging the grass and transferring it to a barrel. You can save 20-25% of your mowing time.
- Money by not having to use as much fertilizer to keep your lawn looking good.
- Aggravation as the cut grass makes your lawn look better and reduces weed growth.
- Water as the cut grass helps reduce water evaporation so you can water less.



### **Correctly Mowing Your Lawn:**

To maintain your lawn properly, avoid mowing more than the top 1/3 of the growing grass. Done consistently, this will result in an attractive, neatly trimmed lawn because the small clippings disappear when they filter down to the soil. Most New Jersey lawns thrive when mowed to about two to three inches, especially in the summer. The taller grass will shade the soil, cool the roots and prevent the growth of weeds, resulting in a healthier lawn.

### **What About Thatch?**

Lawn experts agree that lawn clippings do not create thatch in lawns. Rather, thatch is formed from the accumulation of dead grass roots and stems. The more you fertilize and water your lawn, the faster it grows and the faster thatch accumulates.

### **How Much Nitrogen Is Returned From Lawn Clippings?**

When you recycle grass clippings back into your soil, you'll return nearly two pounds of valuable nitrogen to every thousand square feet of lawn each year. That may not be enough to keep the lawn really healthy, so you may also need to add another 1.5 pounds of nitrogen each year.

### **How to Manage Watering:**

The more you water it, the faster your lawn is going to grow. Also, by controlling watering times and rates, your lawn will grow at manageable levels and stay healthy.

Variables which affect how much water your lawn needs include soil type, temperature, rainfall and turf type. Water your lawn sparingly only as it starts to dry out, but make sure you apply water before the grass begins to wilt. A lawn that needs watering will change color to a blue-green or gray tone and footprints will remain for a long time.

When your lawn needs watering, apply an inch of water to clay soils and a half-inch to sandier soils. To determine how long to water, place several coffee cans on your lawn while sprinkling. Note how long it takes for an inch of water to collect for your soil type. During dry periods, clay soil should be watered weekly and sandier soils twice per week.

### **Alternatives:**

If you don't want to leave the grass clippings on your lawn, considering using them for the following:

- Tilling them into the garden soil. New Jersey soil is commonly low in organic materials and the grass adds needed organics.
- Use them in a backyard compost pile. The grass is half of the required "browns and greens" needed to make composting happen efficiently.

For more information on soil types or to have your soil tested, contact the Rutgers Cooperative Extension at 201-336-6780 .