



# Don't Trash Grass!

## A Guide for Georgetown Homeowners

### Save Time and \$\$\$! Reduce Waste!

Did you know that a 1/2- acre lawn in Massachusetts produces over 3 tons or nearly 260 bags of grass clippings each year!? Think of all the time, money, and effort it would take to bag all those clippings. Why go through all that hassle when it's really not necessary?

You can have a healthy green lawn by leaving grass clippings where they fall! It's simple...grass clippings left on the lawn will decompose and act as a natural organic fertilizer. This allows you to reduce the amount of additional commercial fertilizer you need to apply. Your lawn will still be healthy and **green** because each time you mow, you will be returning valuable nutrients to the soil!

The key word is "less"... less fertilizer, less watering, less work, and best of all, less waste! Recycling clippings back into the lawn requires less effort than disposing of them as waste. No one has to handle the clippings—not you, not your lawn care professional, or the waste management crew. You can reduce your mowing time by nearly 40% by not bagging, and spend less money on fertilizer and trash bags. And by not trashing grass, you'll be doing your part for Georgetown's environment by reducing waste! If you follow these simple **Don't Trash Grass** mowing, fertilizing, and watering guidelines, not only will you have a healthy lawn, but you'll never need to bag grass clippings again!

### Mowing Tips and Techniques

- Any mower can recycle grass clippings. Simply remove the grass catcher! Ask your lawn mower dealer if a special safety plug or adaptor kit is needed to convert your mower into a "recycling" mower. You can also have a mulching blade installed.
- Keep your grass mowed to 2"-3" tall.
- Do not remove more than 1/3 of the grass blade in any single mowing. For example, if your lawn is kept at 2" tall, it should not be allowed to grow higher than 3" before it is cut again.
- Mow when the grass is dry.
- Keep your mower blade sharp. Dull mowers tear the grass, injuring the plant and creating a brownish cast to the turf.
- If the grass gets a bit too high, creating more clippings than normal, simply mow over the clippings a second time to further shred and scatter them.
- If excessive growth occurs between mowings, raise the mower height then gradually lower it over a span of several mowings. This will help prevent shock to the plants.
- When it's time to replace your mower, consider buying a mulching, recycling, or a non-polluting reel mower.



### Fertilizer Application

Proper fertilizer application is important. And remember, when it comes to fertilizer, more is **not** better! Research shows that most grasses require only modest levels of nitrogen for vibrant color and controlled growth. Too much fertilizer will promote rapid growth, resulting in more mowing and more clippings!

Apply fertilizer to your lawn in late April. Avoid fertilizing during the summer and fall, as turf demand for nutrients is low at these times and unused fertilizer is more likely to end up in our streams and ponds. Apply only 1/2 pound of nitrogen per 1000 square feet of lawn at each application. To figure this out, simply divide 100 by twice the percentage of nitrogen (N) in the fertilizer. This will give you the application rate in pounds of fertilizer per 1000 square feet of lawn.

For slower, more uniform growth, choose fertilizers containing sources of slow-release nitrogen such as methylene urea, urea formaldehyde, sulfur coated urea, or IBDU. The bag may also read "water insoluble nitrogen". All are acceptable and will increase the amount of time the grass can use the nutrient.

## Lawn Watering Practices

Massachusetts has a high precipitation rate, so turf grasses here don't have to be watered to survive. Lawns may turn brown and dormant during periods of drought, but will rapidly turn **green** again when moisture is returned to the soil. Remember, the more you water your lawn, the faster it's going to grow and the more you will have to mow it!

- Conserve resources by not watering unless the grass really needs it! Let Mother Nature water your lawn!
- If you choose to water, 1 inch of water is adequate to wet the soil to a depth of 4"-6". Place an empty can under the sprinkler to measure when an inch has been applied. If water begins to run off the lawn before an inch is applied, turn off the water and let it soak in for an hour or so, then resume watering until 1 inch is applied.
- Water deeply and less frequently to encourage deep root growth. Light, frequent watering encourages shallow roots and may lead to increased turf disease and stress injury.
- Avoid watering during mid-day and try not to water in the evenings since a lawn that remains damp during the night is more prone to disease.
- The best time to water is in the early morning because less water is lost through evaporation and transpiration.



## What about Thatch?

Don't worry about grass clippings contributing to thatch problems. Turf experts nationwide agree that clippings do not produce thatch because they are 80% water and decompose quickly. Rather, thatch is the accumulation of dead roots and stems and is most often caused by over-fertilizing and over-watering. A thatch layer of more than 1/2 inch should be removed as a matter of healthy lawn maintenance.

## Other Uses for Clippings

**Compost clippings at home:** Clippings are an excellent source of nitrogen for your compost pile. No more than 1/3 of the pile should be fresh clippings. Mix thoroughly with "brown" materials such as leaves or straw and turn the pile regularly to keep it well oxygenated and to prevent odors.

**Use clippings as mulch:** Apply dried grass clippings directly on the soil about 1 inch thick to reduce weeds, moderate soil temperature, and control soil spattering, erosion, run-off, and evaporation. Avoid mulching with clippings that have been recently treated with herbicides. This can harm your plants. As a precaution, mulch with clippings from herbicide treated lawns only after two lawn mowings.

**Incorporate clippings into garden soil:** Mixing fresh grass clippings into the garden adds nutrients and organic matter which improves the texture and moisture retaining properties of the soil. A two inch layer of grass can be turned into the soil to a depth of 6" about once a month.



## Alternative Landscapes

Consider planting ground covers such as English ivy, pachysandra, and periwinkle; installing shrub beds; or growing a **wildflower meadow** as alternatives to turfgrass. They look beautiful, don't need mowing, and will help reduce lawn maintenance and yard waste! They also produce less stormwater runoff, which helps to protect our streams and ponds.

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