



## Turn Mowing Pains into Healthy Gains

While most of us love being outdoors in the summer sun, we usually don't consider the countless hours spent sweating behind a lawn mower as quality outdoor time. We love our lawns, yet dread the time spent cutting the grass to keep them looking nice. It seems to be the revolving door of outdoor chores ... just when we tucked the mower in after a hard day's work, we find ourselves pulling it back out to start the mowing marathon all over again. It is estimated that mowing comprises about 95% of lawn care duties. For most of us frantically juggling life's endless list of demands, "mowing the lawn" will never rate as a rewarding way to spend our valuable time.

### HABITS THAT CAN HELP

A German proverb states that an old error is always more popular than a new truth. This is certainly the case with lawn care. For so many things in life, we develop habits. Looking both ways before crossing the street is a habit that almost all of us have acquired. Not all of our habits may be good or productive, but they are indeed comfortable, familiar routines that we've developed over time. And so it is with tending to our lawns ... much of what we do is an acquired behavior pattern that through repetition becomes automatic, habitual, and almost involuntary. By examining the lawn care behavior and habits we have developed over time, we can identify what we are doing right and what we need to change. Making simple changes will help us free up more time, grow a greener, healthier lawn, and reduce nutrient pollution in our waters.

### MANAGING BEHAVIOR

Let's start with mowing behavior. A very common misconception is that shaving our grass will save us time. With the mistaken hope of mowing less often, many of us drop the mower blade to the lowest setting and scalp our lawn. But in doing so we are actually creating an unhealthy lawn environment that allows weeds to creep in and the moisture in the topsoil to evaporate. In an attempt to remedy our sickly lawn, we turn to synthetic fertilizers and chemicals which provide quick, short-term growth yet eliminate critical soil organisms, decrease soil health, increase the buildup of thatch, and over time create a chemical-dependent, stressed-out lawn. Ultimately, we are creating more lawn work instead of less!

### AVOID SHORTCUTS

If this scenario sounds familiar, it is time to turn over a new leaf (of grass) and begin to mow high. It is critical to cut

at the correct height for our grass type. Most of us have cool-season grasses such as bluegrass, fescue, rye or a blend. These grasses are more adapted for our cold winters and stay greener for longer periods of the year than warm-season grasses. In general, cool-season grasses should not be cut below three inches and, in fact, by the end of June the cutting deck height should be raised to four inches. In general, your grass should be kept at three to four inches. While this height is generally taller than those traditionally used, it is for good reason. Taller grass will develop proportionally deeper, healthier roots that can resist drought, heat and weed germination. Studies show that mowing your lawn to a height of four inches prevents crabgrass. Also, by maintaining the grass at this height, you will prevent the lawn from drying out, browning, and going into early dormancy. Throughout the summer, remember the following: never cut



more than 1/3 of the total height of your grass, change your mowing pattern, and keep your mower blade sharp for clean-cut, disease-resistant, and overall healthy blades of grass.

### GRASSCYCLING

If you find yourself spending more time with your mower than your family and friends, now is the time to make "grasscycling" a new healthy lawn habit! Grasscycling simply means grass recycling or leaving the grass clippings on the lawn as you mow. An obvious reason to grasscycle is because it saves a significant amount of time. By eliminating raking, emptying your mower bag, and trips to the curb or container, you can actually reduce your mowing time by at least 30 percent. Not only is that good for you, but it is good for your lawn. By using a mulching mower or leaving the clippings, you are effectively feeding your lawn rich, organic matter and recycling important nutrients back into the soil. Grass clippings are 90 percent water so they decompose quickly and add nitrogen to the soil. Contrary to popular belief, leaving grass clippings on your lawn will not cause thatch. Thatch is actually a layer of organic material made up of grass roots, not mown grass blades. Studies show that allowing grass clippings to recycle into your lawn can save about 25 percent of annual fertilizer cost. In fact, every garbage bag full of grass clippings contains up to one-quarter pound of useable nitrogen. Why not put those free nutrients back into your lawn and soil?

### MOW HIGH

If we mow high then let it lie, we reduce the need for chemical fertilizers and reduce the amount of nutrient pollution in our waters. Each of us can examine our lawn-care habits and do our part to decrease the 80 million tons of synthetic fertilizers applied to lawns every year which contribute to Ohio's harmful algal bloom explosions. This summer is a great time to start making your life easier by turning mowing pains into healthy lawn gains.

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## Prevent Pressure Washing Injuries this Season

Exposure to the elements can take its toll on the exterior of a home. Dirt, mold and mildew can compromise the look of a home and yard, which is why many people begin the spring season by dusting off the pressure-washing machine and making resolutions to strip the dirt off of siding, furniture and patios. However, serious injuries can result if a pressure washer is used improperly. Getting schooled in pressure-washer safety is essential to preventing a trip to the emergency room.

It can be easy to underestimate the power

of a pressure washer. An electric-powered machine may generate up to 1,000 pounds per square inch (psi) of water pressure. Gas-powered machines are even more dynamic, offering pressure up to 4,000 psi. That force coupled with wet surfaces can easily cause falls, slips and abrasions. Pressure washers may even cause blindness when chemical cleaners are used in conjunction with the pressure washer.

It is advisable to leave pressure washing to a professional. However, for homeowners who do choose to try this cleaning method, safety precautions are essential.

- Dress properly by donning rubber-soled shoes to prevent slips on wet surfaces.
- Wear protective eyewear to shield the eyes from any projectiles or injury from the water spray



■ PRESSURE,  
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