



Grasscycling: Better than Bagging!



Grass clippings should be treated as a valuable resource. If you've been spending time and effort bagging lawn clippings with each mowing, you can stop. If you have been adding them to your compost, you can stop that too. Grass clippings left on the lawn provide 30 to 50 percent of the nitrogen that turf grasses need to grow well. They also provide organic matter that improves soil structure for a more favorable habitat for beneficial soil dwelling insects and other organisms. Earthworms, for example, improve soil aeration and water movement through the soil, and thereby aid in providing a favorable environment for plant growth. Turf grasses growing in healthy soils are more resistant to diseases, pests and drought.

Grass clippings that are bagged and put at the curb enter the countywide yard waste composting system. This large scale composting is expensive and adds to property taxes: there are costs for transportation and processing and maintenance composting facilities plus the possibility of needing to expand these services unless property owners compost on site and leave grass clippings on lawns.

Clippings left on the lawn do not add to the build-up of thatch. Thatch is the intermingling of living and dead stems and roots of grass with the soil at the ground surface. This is often exacerbated by low pH which discourages the growth of beneficial microorganisms that break down dead plant matter. Grass clippings on the lawn break down rapidly as they are 85 percent water and do not contribute to thatch. Grass clippings also do not increase the possibility of disease. Certain fungal diseases such as leaf spot, red thread and rust have been found to decrease where clippings are left on the lawn.

You do not need a mulching mower in order to leave the grass clippings on the lawn. The mulching mower suspends clippings in the air longer which results in more finely chopped clippings. A standard lawn mower, however, works just fine. It works best to mow regularly, when the grass is dry. Keep the mower blade sharp. The clippings will break down rapidly so that there will not be unsightly clumps of clippings after mowing. However, if the lawn is overly long, it will help to run over the clumps an extra time. Or, you may add them to your compost. You may also use them as mulch in your flower or vegetable beds provided you have not applied a weed killer or weed & feed product to the lawn within at least three weeks. If you use grass clippings as mulch, spread them in a layer no more one-inch thick at each mowing.

Please remove grass clippings from hard surfaces, such as driveways or streets, to prevent nutrients from being washed into waterways when it rains. Also, compost grass clippings and other organic materials away from streams, lakes or wetlands in order to prevent nutrients from running off into water bodies and having a negative affect on water quality and aquatic habitat.

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The information on pest management for New York State contained in this publication is dated 4/2011. The user is responsible for obtaining the most up-to-date pest management information. Contact any Cornell Cooperative Extension county office or PMEP (<http://pmep.cce.cornell.edu/>), the Cornell Cooperative Extension pesticide information website. The information herein is no substitute for pesticide labeling. The user is solely responsible for reading and following manufacturer's labeling and instructions.