



Garden Clippings



Niagara College Greenhouse & Nursery Success Sheet No. 110

Pesticide-free Lawn Care

Build Healthy Soil

Grass grows best in a biologically active soil in which soil organisms, such as earthworms, recycle plant material so that nutrients are slowly released in the root zone of the grass. Organic fertilizers, including compost, are extremely effective because they release nutrients slowly, are less likely to run off into streams, and support microorganisms that increase soil fertility and fight lawn diseases.

Fertilizers must be applied in the right amounts and at the right time. Optimal dates, amounts, and nutrients for your lawn vary depending on your local climate, your soil, and the type of grass growing in your lawn.

Mow High and Often

Each grass species has a range of optimal mowing heights. Mowing your lawn at the high end of this range allows the grass to develop a deeper root system and tolerate drought, heat, shade, disease, and pests. To have a high-quality lawn, you need to mow frequently when the grass is growing fast. You should remove no more than one third of the length of the grass blades, so the grass is not stressed.

Try Grasscycling

Grasscycling (leaving grass clippings on the lawn when you mow) adds plant nutrients and organic matter to your soil and keeps the clippings out of landfills. Not only does it save time, but it will also reduce your need

for fertilizers. Grasscycling can be done with a regular lawnmower by simply removing the bag.

Water Deeply and Less Often

Frequent, light watering produces a shallow-rooted lawn. Overwatering leaches grass nutrients, promotes certain weeds, and causes oxygen starvation of grass roots. This means that your lawn must have the right amount of water.

Following are three ways to tell whether your lawn needs water: First, if your lawn is dark green and doesn't spring back when you walk on it, it needs watering. Second, dig a small hole and look at the soil. If the top 2 inches is dry, it's time to water. Third, you can also push a 6-inch screwdriver into the lawn. If it goes in easily, the soil is still moist. If it takes effort, then it's time to water

Remove Excess Thatch

Thatch is the partially decomposed grass stems, roots, and leaves found between the green part of a lawn and the surface of the soil. A thick thatch layer can be a problem because grass roots grow in the thatch instead of the soil and make your lawn less tolerant to drought.

If you need to reduce thatch, you can use a thatching rake. Simply pull it across the lawn and discard the debris.

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