SOME FACTS ABOUT MOWING
Kentucky Bluegrass/Ryegrass/Fescue

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HEIGHT/FREQUENCY

As the mowing height is lowered, increase the mowing frequency. For example, if you mow in the spring at a 2½ inch height, you can usually get by with a frequency of one mowing per week; if you mow at 1½ inch height, you will often need to mow every 4 to 5 days; if you mow at 1 inch, mow 3 times/week.

If possible never mow off more than 1/3 to ½ of the turf height; e.g. when mowing at 2 inches, repeat mowing when the grass gets to 3 inches. Mowing off more than 50% of the leaves causes scalping -- scalping during the hot summer will kill some grass plants and will always increase weeds.

Best overall mowing height for Kentucky bluegrass and tall fescue is 2 to 2½ inches.

If varying mowing height, mow higher in the summer, and lower in the late fall or early spring.

Higher heights will reduce weed infestations and improve rooting depth of grasses.

When lowering height, it is best to do it gradually -- reducing the height in 1/4 to ½ inch increments.

When necessary to remove an excessive amount of top growth in a single mowing, some turf thinning and increased weeds will occur if done during spring or fall; weeds will greatly increase and severe turf kill may occur if done during summer.

Since approximately ½ of the total annual growth of cool-season grass normally occurs in April and May, the mowing frequency must be greatest at that time.

Tall fescue and perennial ryegrass grow faster and therefore need more frequent mowing than Kentucky bluegrass.

Grass growing in shade elongates faster than in sun, therefore, it is best to mow turf growing in shade slightly higher.

Do not allow turf to enter winter at a high height, i.e. 3 inches or higher. Always mow during late fall after growth subsides. Excessive fall growth increases winter lodging, winter and early spring diseases, and causes excessive browning of the turf.

To manage diseases such as brown patch, it is best to maintain a lower than normal summer height.

GRASS CLIPPINGS

Grass clippings should only be collected when:

- a serious disease is actively infecting the grass;
- the growth is very high and normal mowing tends to windrow the clippings, causing smothering of the grass below;
- a lot of weed seed can be collected and discarded.

Clippings are normally good -- they return nutrients back to the soil.

Grass clippings do not add to or cause a problem with **THATCH** -- the organic layer of dead and living shoots, stems and roots that accumulates between the green foliage and soil surface.

TIMING

A close mowing height in late fall will improve winter and early spring green color.

Mowing when the foliage is dry, as opposed to wet, reduces disease transmission and clumping of clippings.

To reduce compaction, large commercial mowers should not be used when the soil is wet.

Never mow when the soil is very dry and the temperature is higher than 90°F. This mechanically damages the grass and can thin-out or completely kill the turf.

An early spring mowing will even-up the turf, mow off the old brown leaves, and cause earlier spring green-up.

When the soil becomes dry in the summer and growth subsides, don't mow more often than necessary to prevent scalping.

MOWING METHODS

Alternate mowing directions to reduce the constant compaction and scuffing effect of mowers, and to encourage a more uniform removal of prostrate leaves of grasses and/or weeds.

Discharge clippings away from sidewalks, driveways and streets in order to reduce the mess and loss of beneficial nutrients.

While mowing, a small amount of tree leaves can be mulched and deposited back on the turf without damage. If leaves completely cover the surface, it is best to remove the leaves before mowing.

It is a fable to refrain from spring mowing in order to allow the grass to go-to-seed; turf density is reduced and the seed almost never germinates.

MOWERS

If properly adjusted, reel-type mowers will give a superior cut at short heights; rotary mowers are more easily maintained and most effective when mowing at heights of 1 1/2 to 3". Fast, elongating weeds are most difficult to mow with reel mowers.

Rotary mower blades should be sharpened several times **EVERY** year. A dull mower will shred leaf tips and give a brown tint.

Leaf shredding is most common with perennial ryegrass and fescue, and is most obvious during May and June when these grasses are attempting to flower. The flowering stem is most difficult to mow, even with a sharp mower.

Dull mower blades increase fuel consumption, wear on engine, belts and bearings, increase the buildup of clippings retained under the mower deck, and the constant leaf tearing increases disease susceptibility and water use.

The turned-up ends of a rotary mower blade cause a suction that helps lift prostrate leaves and weeds for a more uniform cut, and also helps reduce disease problems.

Mulching mowers cut grass leaves in short lengths than conventional rotary mowers and often will result in a more aesthetic cut. Mulching mowers require more power than conventional mowers and are very poor when mowing taller or wet grass.

AESTHETICS

For aesthetics, turf can be striped by mowing in a back-and-forth manner, in straight lines. For example, mow one week in a North/South pattern and the next week in an East/West pattern. Diagonal patterns are also attractive.

Many garden type weeds are topped and killed by the mower; weeds that are flowering are most susceptible.

SAFETY

Rotary mowers are extremely dangerous and cause thousands of serious injuries annually. Never mow when kids or adults are close by and be extremely careful on sloping turf areas.