

GRASS CLIPPINGS:

Let Them Fall Where They May!

The Ecological and Economic Impact of Grass Clippings

Lawn grasses provide many benefits to our immediate environment. Soil erosion control, improved protection of groundwater, improvement of the quality of life through noise and dust abatement, improvements of air quality, and aesthetic and recreational contributions are some of the assets provided by turfgrasses. However, disposal of grass clippings requires the attention of homeowners to be a good land steward!

The common practice of treating grass clippings as waste is resulting in overloaded landfills and stormwater pollution. Grass clippings left on the streets and sidewalks pollute waterbodies by entering nearby storm drains. Excessive algae growth is a detrimental outcome of yard waste pollution in streams, lakes, and ponds throughout the country. At large amounts, algae can be harmful to fish and humans by limiting the amount of oxygen in the water. In addition to algae growth, grass clippings can also clog storm drains resulting in potential flooding and expensive maintenance to correct the problem.



Grass Pollution Prevention

Leave it on the Lawn – A mulching lawnmower shreds the clippings and leaves them on the grass to decompose. Mulching not only prevents stormwater pollution, it also provides moisture and fertilizer for the lawn.

Backyard Composting – If grass clippings are typically bagged then backyard composting is another solution to pollution prevention. Home compost piles are becoming increasingly popular among residents. Adding grass to the compost pile provides both moisture and nitrogen allowing for more rapid decomposition. Composting yard waste is not necessarily restricted to a dedicated compost pile, mulching a garden is an additional option. Grass clippings provide natural fertilizer through nitrogen, potassium, and some phosphorus components. However, if weed killers were recently used on the lawn then it's inadvisable to mulch the garden.

Less Frequent Lawn Mowing – Mowing your grass less can be beneficial and prevent weeds from growing. Cutting only the top 1/3 of the grass blades will shade out some weeds and encourage deep root systems. Additionally, leaving 2 to 3 inches of grass keeps most of the nutrients in. However, it is important to check with Municipal or HOA regulations before letting the grass get too high.

