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Chris Ramsey

## Raise the Deck

Is your grass looking brown this summer? If so, you may be able to make some changes so that it will be greener and healthier.

The foundation for a healthy, competitive lawn starts with an understanding of photosynthesis. You may have forgotten, but you probably at least heard this word in high school biology. It is the process by which plants take carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and sunlight and then produce carbohydrates and oxygen. Just as plant carbohydrates are a critical part of the human diet, plants also use these carbohydrates to maintain growth.

When turf grass is mowed too closely, we limit the ability of our turf to manufacture carbohydrates. A lack of plant food results in a weaker and diminishing root system. The above ground portion of a plant, such as turf grass, and the root system mirror each other. A shorter grass height will only support a shallow root system.

A higher cutting height will also encourage a denser stand by preventing weeds. Less sunlight that makes its way to the soil surface means less weed competition. While it may be a small difference, the soil surface temperature will be lower when a turf grass is mowed higher.

Fescue is by far the best turf grass for Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia as we live in an area where warm season grasses like bermudagrass often are killed by our colder winters. Fescue is a cool season grass and performs best at a mowing height of three inches. During the dryer and hotter part of the summer, a grass would survive better at a mowing height of 3 and ½ to 4 inches.

Competitive summer weeds such as bermudagrass, crabgrass, goosegrass, and dallisgrass tolerate close mowing. When a lawn is mowed at two inches and below, these grassy weeds are more likely to become established as they take advantage of the open areas in the turf.

Many lawn management strategies such as fertilization, chemical weed control, dethatching, aeration, and over-seeding all cost you money. The goal for turf grass weed control should be to maintain a competitive, dense turf. The first step in this process doesn't cost anything. Just raise the deck.