**No Need To Bag Grass Clippings** (published 2026-07-11)
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Most people want an attractive lawn and go to great lengths to get it done. Many people feel it necessary to bag the grass clippings to have an attractive landscape and with that comes the problem of how we dispose of them. Some people mulch with them and some compost them, however, many people send them to the landfill. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that yard waste accounts for 18% of the refuse that we historically have dumped into landfills, a figure that rises as high as 50% during the growing season. In recent years, dumping of grass clippings has become a problem because landfills are running out of space. If lawns are well maintained and mowed on schedule, this is one issue we can all help with.

One problem with off-site disposal is that we lose plant **organic matter** and the **nutrients** contained in the clippings. An environmentally sound option is the direct return of fresh clippings to the lawn. This is known as **Grasscycling.** This practice eliminates the need to haul grass clippings to a landfill.

Proper mowing practices and fertility are essential if this is to work well. If grass clippings are left in place, they must be cut small enough to filter through the turfgrass canopy and down into the soil region. Once this occurs, the clippings can decompose and become part of the continuing turf-soil nutrient cycle.

The following mowing practices will enhance your lawn's appearance and hardiness. Mow when the grass needs it! A guide is to mow often enough so that at any one mowing only **one third** of the leaf height is removed. **Remember take one third leave two thirds!** This will probably be every five to six days during the active growing season, and every 10 days or less when growth slows down if fertilizers are applied correctly.

Keep mower blades **sharp.** Dull blades rip and tear the turfgrass which promotes disease, causes the shredded leaves to appear tan and ragged, and results in weakened plants.

Mow when the grass is **dry.** Wet grass clings to the mower and clumps on the turf. Wet clippings also do not filter through the turf canopy to add nitrogen (N) as easily as dry clippings.

Recommended mowing heights for common turfgrass types in our area are as follows; Kentucky bluegrass – 1.5 to 2.5 inches and tall fescue – 2 to 3 inches.

**Lawn Management After Drought**

Consider the following from Dr. Mike Goatley, turf specialist at VA Tech. Following an extended period of hot dry weather, rains provide a very quick distinction between living and dead cool-season turf. Turfgrasses will quickly resume the expansion and emergence of previously formed leaves that were shut down by the drought and will also initiate new leaf growth that will contribute to an overall greening of the turf within a day or so of a significant

rainfall event. If the turf does not show signs of recovery, then make preparations for renovating the turf in the fall, the best season to establish cool-season grasses.

If the entire lawn has failed, then complete renovation involving an application of a non-selective herbicide such as glyphosate to control all the existing vegetation is often appropriate. At this time, you have the opportunity to consider if perhaps another cool-season turf might be better suited to your needs and climate. Tall fescue works well across much of the state and research at the Hampton Roads research station is showing that a mix of tall fescue and hybrid bluegrass has desirable qualities. Complete renovation is costly, very labor-intensive and often is not required. Most lawns will likely have problem spots measuring anywhere from 50 to 150 sq feet and these spots will be surrounded by healthy, great looking grass, so it makes sense to concentrate only on the small areas.

No matter the level of renovation, be sure to conduct a soil test if one has not been made within the past 3 years. When choosing the grass for spot renovations, try to select grasses with similar appearance and growth habit as to the current lawn in order to maintain turf uniformity. The final pre-plant step is to properly prepare the soil for planting. Some degree of soil preparation is essential for successful turfgrass establishment.

What about how much seed to plant? Let’s consider what NOT to do in order to handle spot renovations correctly: visibly seeing 1 seed every sq inch is NOT enough, but at the same time, seed stacked upon seed so thick that you cannot see the soil is even worse! It is not an absolute number by any means because seed size among species is highly variable, but for most grasses somewhere between 10-15 seeds per square inch corresponds fairly well with recommended planting rates for new establishments. The area should be mulched with straw.

Call your Extension office for specific seeding rates and recommendations.