

BOBBY LAWN **NEWSLETTER**



MOWING

April/May 2002

Ahh, Spring! All around people are anxious to get outside, wash their cars, rake their lawns and, most importantly, get in that first cut with the mower. The smell of freshly cut grass, and the added health benefits to yourself make it all worthwhile. The novelty of mowing the grass may start to wane after several cuts, but one should never put off taking care of your lawn. Mowing and the how-to of proper mowing does have a major impact on your lawn's appearance and health.

The normal lawn in our area, with a typical mixture of grasses such as Kentucky Blue Grasses, Fine Fescues, and Perennial Rye Grasses should be cut at a height of 2½ - 3 inches (6.5 – 7.5 cm). We prefer 3 inches. This usually is the highest or near the highest setting on your lawn mower. To check this, cut a small bit of your lawn, then use a ruler to measure its length. Get right down at ground level to read it.

Why cut your lawn at this height? Well, it looks nice. A lawn mowed at this height will be healthier. The grass plants will have a deeper,

thicker, and more wide-spread root system. A healthy root system promotes a healthier and more robust plant. Sounds like we're going in circles here. A healthy growing grass plant will have more tillers making a thicker lawn. A thicker lawn shades its own root system better than a thin lawn, keeping the soil temperature cooler, making for less moisture evaporation and therefore less watering. A thicker lawn deters weed growth, including crabgrass, by both shading small weed plants and by being in a better position to compete for nutrients and moisture. Oh yeah, it's nice to walk on too.

Mow your lawn as often as it is needed. Mowing once a week may not cut it. Oops. Mowing once a week may not be enough. No more than one third of the grass blade should be removed during a cutting. There is actually some science behind this practice. Cutting too much off the leaf blade causes the plant to use carbohydrate stores in its roots to initiate new growth. This weakens the root system causing a weaker all round grass plant. You know, the circle thing again. By frequent mowing you can

leave clippings on the lawn which will not significantly contribute to thatch build-up, whereas continuous removal of grass clippings reduces the nutrients they supply to your lawn by as much as 30% making one extra fertilization necessary.

Lawns should be cut in the cooler part of the day. Grass that is limp under heat stress is more difficult to cut than turgid grass blades. The lawn should be cut when it is dry. Grass wet from dew or rain is also more difficult to cut and usually ends up with a ragged appearance. The grass will cut more cleanly and the clippings will distribute more evenly when they are dry.

Try to cut your lawn in a different direction each time you mow it. Grass cut in the same direction every time tends to begin to lie in that direction. Cutting in a different direction each time will help it to stand up better. Grass that is standing upright provides more shade to the soil all day long and, of course, gives it all the temperature and moisture-related benefits.

Keep your mower blade sharp. The grass blades should be cut off not torn. Think of cutting your nicely barbecued steak with a sharp knife or tearing it apart with a couple of forks. Raggedly cut grass blades create a great entry point for disease organisms and tend to turn colour, giving your lawn a brownish tinge. Sharpening your mower blades once a month is not too much.

Be safe. Take a quick walk over your lawn before starting to mow. Your mower was designed to cut grass, not twigs or toys. Running over something and having it thrown from the mower discharge chute is not very safe either. Cut your lawn in a safe direction. Do not push it up or down steep inclines. Keep pets, children (and all persons, for that matter) away while you are mowing.

Don't refuel your mower on the lawn. Spilt gas will damage the grass and it will take some time to recover.

Finally, DON'T be in a rush. Prepare for the job properly, take your time and do a good job. Then, when you are finished, sit back, relax, and survey a job well done.

