

# Hints for a Beautiful Lawn

There is certainly nothing more beautiful than a properly maintained lawn. Following these simple hints will reduce your effort and guarantee a lawn that you can be proud of:

## **Vary the mowing direction**

Grass tends to grow in the direction it is mowed. To prevent your lawn from appearing to lean one way or the other, vary your mowing direction each time you mow. This will keep your grass looking straighter as well as prevent a washboard effect. To make sure that you mow the entire lawn, overlap each pass by several inches. Mowing the lawn soon after it has been watered will cause the grass to stick to the mower blades and clog the mower. Wait until the blades have had time to dry before mowing.



## **How Much to Mow**

How much to cut at each mowing depends upon the growth habit of the grass and the leaf texture, or width of the leaves. Grass survival depends on having adequate leaf surface for food production through photosynthesis. Mowing too low removes too much of the food producing area. As the grass literally starves, the lawn thins and looks poor. Mowing too high can hurt the appearance or usefulness of the turf.

## **Mow when the grass is actively growing**

You can determine when and how often to mow your lawn by taking into account the growth rate of the grass during each season and the desired resulting height of the lawn. Grasses require more frequent mowing during their active growing period. Cool-season grasses are most active during the spring and fall while warm-season grasses are the most active during the summer months. How much fertilizer and water your lawn receives will also affect the growth rate.

## **Remove one-third of the height at a time**

Mow frequently enough so that only one-third of the leaf is removed at any one time. Do not drastically or suddenly change the cutting height. If the grass has become too tall, reestablish the recommended height by mowing more frequently for a while and gradually lowering the mowing height of successive cuttings, following the one-third rule.

## **Complete fertilizers**

Fertilizers containing all three primary nutrients (nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium) are called complete fertilizers. If high levels of phosphorus and potassium are already present in the soil, supply nitrogen alone. For most established lawns, nitrogen is the only nutrient that needs to be supplied on a regular basis, although it may be beneficial to apply a complete fertilizer with all three nutrients at least once a year. Turfgrass nutritional needs change from month to month because of temperature and moisture variations. Fertilize when turfgrasses are actively growing. Active growing periods vary by turf species and location. The last application should be 6 to 8 weeks before the likely date of the first frost.

## **When to aerate**

In general, if you see areas damaged from too much traffic or if water puddles on your lawn or runs off without soaking in, your soil may be compacted and you need to aerate your lawn. Aerify your soil during the spring when grasses are actively growing. Avoid aerifying during the summer months when high temperatures may be detrimental to lawns.

## **Frequency**

The frequency of aeration depends on soil type, how the turfgrass is used, and its expected appearance. Heavy clay soils need to be aerated a couple of times a year while sandy soils may only need aeration once a year. Lawns with very high traffic may need to be aerated several times a year. For lawns with little or no activity, aeration may not be needed.

This article adapted from Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service, USDA. Please contact the Farm Advisor's office at [cdcalaveras@ucdavis.edu](mailto:cdcalaveras@ucdavis.edu) or 754-6477 with your agricultural questions. Talk to a certified Master Gardener every Wednesday, 10:00-12:00, 754-2880. To speak with a Master Gardener in Tuolumne County, please call 209 533-5696.