

NORTHWOODS YARD & GARDEN

Weekly Column

July 8, 2024

Proper Mowing Key to Lawn Health

Although typically not viewed as a complicated process, mowing has a major impact on the appearance and health of your lawn. With all our rain it has been a struggle to keep up with lawn growth but consider these guidelines for properly mowing lawns.

Proper mowing height is the first important mowing decision. Mowing too short is the most common lawn care mistake that is easily correctable. Closely mowed golf greens are creeping bentgrass, a species adapted to a close cut. Lawn grasses in the northwoods, such as Kentucky bluegrass, perennial ryegrass, and fine fescues are not well-suited for close mowing.

For most lawns, a mowing height between two and one-half to three inches is suggested. Now that July is here and summer heat is likely, mow at 3 inches or even slightly higher. Lawns mowed at higher heights tend to have deeper roots, less weed problems, and look much better as conditions get warmer and drier. Crabgrass is one weed less likely in taller lawns.



Along with mowing height, the other major guideline for mowing is proper frequency, or interval between mowing. Mow as lawn growth dictates rather than choosing a specific day of the week. Follow the rule of one-third, which means do not remove more than one-third of the grass leaf in anyone cutting. This often calls for mowing more than once a week during cool, wet weather such as we have seen so far this season.

Assuming lawns are mowed on a regular basis, there is no need to collect clippings. Clippings should readily filter back down into the lawn if the lawn is mowed often enough, following the rule of one-third. Returned in this manner, clippings readily decompose (contain 75 - 80 percent water) and does not cause thatch. Clippings also recycle nutrients, in particular nitrogen. As a result, lawns with clippings returned on a regular basis need less fertilizer applied than lawns with clippings removed.

Make sure lawn mower blades are sharpened on a regular basis to assure an excellent quality cut. Dull blades will shred grass leaves, resulting in a whitish cast over the lawn after mowing. Periodically changing the mowing pattern direction can also help mowing quality.

Finally, selecting a mower involves numerous factors, many being personal preference. Reel type mowers, such as used on putting greens and sports fields, give the best cut, but are usually expensive and difficult to maintain. Rotary mowers are the most widely used kind of mower sold for home lawn use.

Interested in learning more about
Horticulture in Iron County?
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