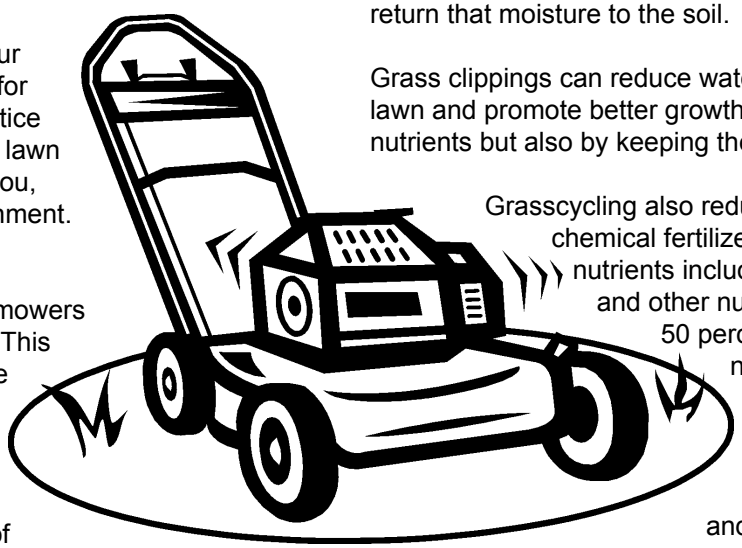
DO YOUR PART:

DHEC'S OFFICE OF SOLID WASTE REDUCTION & RECYCLING

Grasscycle

What is grasscycling?

Grasscycling is recycling grass clippings by leaving them on your lawn instead of collecting them for disposal. Grasscycling is a practice that can help produce a healthy lawn while at the same time benefit you, your community and the environment. Grasscycling works.



Did you know that the first bag mowers made their debut in the 1950s? This was immediately followed by the time-honored American tradition of collecting grass clippings and placing them at the curb – sometimes in a bag – to be picked up with the rest of the yard trimmings to be disposed of at a landfill.

You may not have thought of it, but bagging and placing yard trimmings at the curb is a wasteful behavior in many ways. It can be an expensive practice with the cost of the bags as well as transportation to pick up the clippings. It also robs your lawn of natural fertilizer.

Consider changing that behavior. Consider grasscycling.

What are the benefits of grasscycling?

There are many benefits to grasscycling. Proper grasscycling:

- saves time and is less work (no more bagging, less time maintaining lawn);
- saves money (less water and fertilizer are needed); and
- encourages a healthier lawn (clippings contain valuable nutrients).

Lawn maintenance time can be reduced since the bagging and disposal of grass clippings is eliminated. There are other hidden benefits. By not handling heavy bags of grass clippings, back and other injuries can be avoided.

Grasscycling helps reduce water use. Grass clippings, which are 75 to 85 percent water, decompose rapidly and return that moisture to the soil.

Grass clippings can reduce water evaporation from the lawn and promote better growth by not only providing nutrients but also by keeping the soil temperature cooler.

Grasscycling also reduces the need for chemical fertilizers. Grass clippings contain nutrients including nitrogen. The nitrogen and other nutrients provide up to 50 percent of your lawn's fertilizer needs. That's good for the environment. That helps protect local streams, rivers and lakes from runoff pollution from yards and gardens.

Grasscycling is simple.

To grasscycle properly:

- **Cut your grass when it's dry.**
- **Cut your grass regularly.** A good rule is to cut no more than one-third of the grass height at any one mowing. Cutting off more than one-third at a time can stop roots from growing and require frequent watering during dry summers to keep the grass alive. In addition, the one-third rule produces smaller clippings that disappear quickly by filtering down to the soil surface.
- **Cut your grass with a sharp blade.** Sharp blades cut the grass cleanly and that helps ensure rapid healing and regrowth. Dull blades tear and bruise the grass. The wounded grass becomes weakened and is less able to prevent invading weeds and recover from disease.

Many people believe that grass clippings left on a lawn will smother the grass underneath or cause thatch. Forget it, it's not true. Thatch is not made up of grass clippings, but is a layer of roots, leaf sheaths and rhizomes. This layer stops water and fertilizer from penetrating into the soil where the roots are found.

Grasscycling does not spread lawn disease. Improper watering and fertilizing are the primary causes of the spread of lawn disease.

If the lawn is not cut frequently enough and long clippings are left on the lawn, it may produce a “hay-like” look that can be unsightly. Again, it is important to cut the lawn frequently to produce small grass clippings that will fall between the standing blades and decompose quickly.

To maximize the benefits of grasscycling, aerate your lawn. In the spring, rent an aerator, which removes small cores of soil from the lawn. This opens the soil and permits greater movement of water, fertilizer and air – which speeds decomposition of the grass clippings and improves deep root growth. Water thoroughly when needed. Make sure you follow proper lawn care for your type of grass.

Grasscycling and Compost

In order to encourage recycling and save landfill space, South Carolina and most other states do not allow grass clippings and other yard trimmings to be disposed of in Class 3 landfills. The intent of the law is to encourage local governments to set up large-scale mulching and composting operations. Unfortunately, in many counties that has not happened and the yard trimmings are disposed of at a different type of landfill. There are counties, however, that divert yard trimmings to grinding or composting facilities that use the end product beneficially in landscaping and other similar applications.

No matter what your county does, you can do it yourself. You can handle many of your yard trimmings as well as food scraps (no meat or dairy products) by setting up your own backyard composting bin. (See the “Do Your Part: Backyard Composting” fact sheet.)

SOURCE: “Smart Gardener Handbook” – a publication from the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control’s (DHEC) Office of Solid Waste Reduction and Recycling (Office). For more information, visit **www.scdhec.gov/environment/lwm/recycle/compost.htm** or call **1-800-768-7348**.

SOURCE: “Home Composting Made Easy.” The guidebook is available at no cost through the Office by calling **1-800-768-7348**.

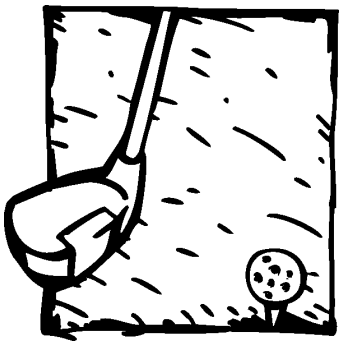
The Facts About Grasscycling

Grasscycling is leaving clippings on the lawn after mowing. When done properly, clippings quickly decompose and return nutrients to the soil naturally. Grasscycling makes caring for your lawn easier and can reduce lawn maintenance by as much as 50 percent because you don’t have to bag or dispose of clippings.

The practice of leaving clippings on the lawn also slows water loss through evaporation and reduces the need for fertilization.

Grasscycling works.

Many golf courses and parks have practiced grasscycling for years.



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DHEC’s Office of Solid Waste Reduction and Recycling “DO YOUR PART” fact sheets provide general information on environmental topics. Readers are encouraged to reproduce this material. For more information about solid waste issues, please call **1-800-768-7348** or visit our Web site at **www.scdhec.gov/recycle**. Please send written correspondence to: DHEC’s Office of Solid Waste Reduction and Recycling, 2600 Bull Street, Columbia, SC 29201.

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OR-0611 3/10