

Lawn Care

T.M. REG

PACIFIC STATES EDITION

HOW TO MOW YOUR LAWN

OF ALL the varied operations in caring for a lawn, probably the most universally practiced is that of cutting the grass. Years and years of routine have divested it of any art and the realization that a lawn is sickly because of improper mowing seldom occurs. There is more to cutting a lawn than pushing the mower. This is better appreciated after some acquaintance with the physiology of grass plants.

Should a lawn be cut high or clipped close? This is a subject of greater discussion than any other phase of mowing and in the answer lies the secret of many of the most successful lawns.

Custom seems to dictate close cutting for the sake of neatness and time, but a thorough analysis will cast doubt on both scores. The thing that makes a newly mown lawn look neat is not the height of the grass but the uniformity of the blade tips.

This matter of neatness also involves the kind of seed sown when the lawn was built. Improperly compounded lawn seed contains mostly cheap, fast-growing grasses. These outstrip the

more desirable grass in their rate of growth and give a lawn a ragged, unkempt appearance very soon after each mowing. A skillfully blended seed mixture, on the other hand, is composed of grasses having similar rates of growth so that they retain their tidy appearance longer after cutting.

For those who argue that close cutting reduces the frequency of mowing,

it can be repeated that uniformity of the tips and not the length of the grass is the factor involved. The only possible reason why short cutting might mean less mowing is that closely cropped grass is usually unhealthy and therefore recovers slowly from each scalping.

In deciding what height of cut is best, one must first determine the type or types of

grass predominating in his lawn. If it is mostly Bentgrass, then close cutting is advisable. The blades of Bent do not grow so upright as other grasses. Also the stem structure is shorter. These enable the plants to thrive and remain green under close mowing. Bentgrass is usually planted for its fine texture and if allowed to grow rank it tends

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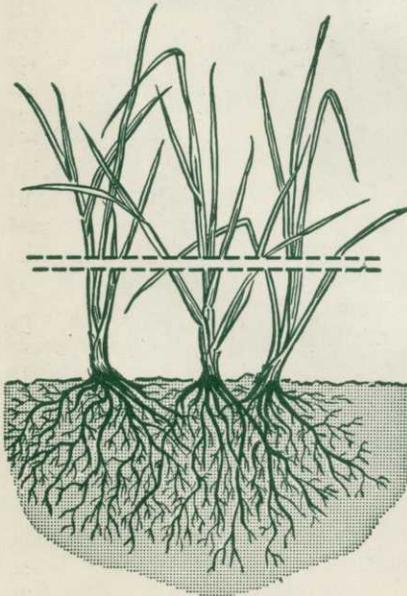
This unique bulletin service is now in its 21st consecutive year. While LAWN CARE has been reaching its majority, readership has grown from five thousand to an enthusiastic million.

to coarsen in texture and thus its principal advantage is lost. Bent lawns should be cut $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ inch high.

Most home lawns are composed of grasses that grow in a more upright position. Their stem structure is greater. These grasses thrive much better under "high" cutting. For them a minimum of $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches is best. Why? Let us examine an individual grass plant for the answer.

Grass Blades Make Food

It is in the blades of grass that food, absorbed through the roots, is transformed into sugars and starches. The blades are the digestive system that enables the plant to assimilate various nutrients. Close cutting removes this part of the plant and the digestive function is severely hindered. The grass then becomes anemic even with plenty of food in the soil. Unhealthy grass does not have a good color.



Blades are the greenest part of the grass. Close cutting removes so much that only bleached stems remain.

This loss of color is not only due to poor health. Remember that the blades are the greenest portion of a grass plant. Cut off any sizeable portion of them by close cropping and what happens? The stems are exposed. Stems are not very green and neither is a lawn that has been so defoliated that mostly stems remain.

Higher cut grass has more extensive and deeper roots for there is a definite correlation between the growth above ground and below. In heavy soils such as adobe, an extensive root system adds valuable humus, helps to break up compactness. In light, sandy soils it reduces damage from drying.

Saves Water. In periods of drouth, one of the greatest benefits of high cutting is the conservation of moisture. The taller and thicker foliage reduces evaporation from the surface of the ground. At the same time, the deeper roots are able to draw on a larger volume of soil for moisture so the turf is better able to retain its green color during prolonged dry spells and between irrigations.

Another benefit is the reduction of soil erosion. Heavy drops of water falling as rain or from the lawn sprinkler penetrate closely cropped grass with enough force to wash soil away from the surface roots, exposing them to drying winds and excessive evaporation. The denser topgrowth of properly cut lawns breaks the force of water drops and minimizes soil disturbance.

Less Weed Trouble. Examination shows that closely mown lawns are more subject to weed invasion. The turf is open and inviting to weeds. In contrast the dense foliage of a high cut lawn, while conserving moisture, is shading the surface of the soil. This may be all that is needed to prevent the germination of weed seeds just waiting the right conditions to sprout.

Even if a weed does get started its struggle is difficult because the grass is healthy and vigorous. It crowds the weeds, and should these be of the spreading kind like Bermuda Grass or Pennywort, its progress is materially retarded. Bermuda Grass or Devil Grass as it is justly called, is a subtropical plant that requires sunshine to thrive. It is much less aggressive if shaded, even if only by taller grass.

Rosette types of weeds such as Dandelions, Daisies and Plantain will flatten out in a close cut lawn and smother the grass underneath. This is less likely to occur in a properly cut lawn where the grass actually holds up the weed so the mower will defoliate it.

Recovery Quicker. Insects and turf diseases may attack grass at times whether it be tall or short. But since tall grass is healthier, the damage will be less and recovery quicker.

Adjusting the Mower

To a great many people a lawn mower is shrouded in a certain amount of mystery. That it can be adjusted for varying heights of cut may be a revelation. Unfortunately this feature is considered all too seldom in purchasing a mower. Some on the market aren't at all flexible and cannot be adjusted high enough.

A screw driver and pair of pliers are the only tools needed to adjust the height of cut of a good mower. Place the mower on a flat surface to accomplish the change in setting.

Lawn mowers are equipped with rollers mounted back of the cutting reel. At each end of the roller is a bracket fastened to the mower frame. By adjusting these brackets the roller may be lowered. This tilts back the cutter reel and automatically raises the bedknife in relationship to the surface.

The distance from this surface to the cutting edge of the bedknife is the height of cut.

Some of the newer mowers have wing nuts or knobs that can be turned without the need of tools.

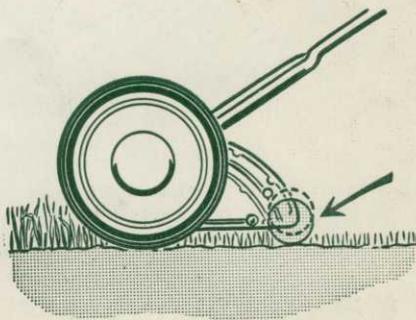
Many mowers cannot be set high enough. This problem may be solved by installing a roller of larger diameter or by use of snap-on rubber tires to increase the diameter of the wheels.

A good lawn mower, like a car, should get a periodic check-up in a reliable shop. If it is in good adjustment and sharp, it will cut uniformly and cleanly. A dull mower chews or tears the grass tips, causing them to turn brown and discolor the lawn.

Frequency of Cutting

Lawns can not be properly mowed on a time schedule. The frequency of mowing is dependent on the rate of growth, not the calendar. This, in turn, is dependent on the amount of moisture, sunlight and heat. It is better to mow too often than not often enough. If cutting is neglected then too much of the grass plant is suddenly removed in cutting. This amounts to a severe amputation, something of a shock to the plant.

Remember that the bedknife on a lawn mower is a rigid piece of steel



By moving the roller down, the bed knife and cutting reels are moved up.

which does not flex to adjust to the contour of the ground between the mower wheels. High spots in this area can easily be scalped, causing the grass to weaken and thin out.

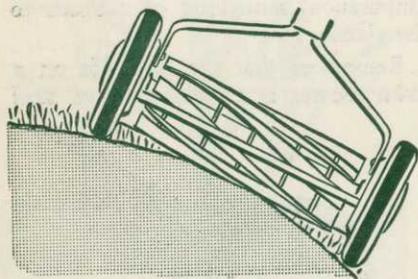
Terraces and Edges

Mowing cross-wise to the top of a terrace puts the mower wheels in a lower position than the ground surface between them so the bedknife will really scalp the grass.

Terraces should be mown up and down hill rather than crosswise. Similar care must be exercised at the edges of a lawn or thin spots will begin to show there too. This is especially true if a ditch is maintained along flower beds or at the edges of drives or walks. Sometimes one mower wheel is purposely run in the ditch in order to cut the grass at the very edge of the lawn. This again puts the bedknife against the ground and the turf is shaved.

The Clippings

What to do with the clippings is always a matter of controversy. Should they be caught even though a grass catcher is a nuisance? Should they be



Improper mowing technique that scalps the crown of a terrace.

raked up? Or should they be allowed to remain on the lawn?

Whenever grass clippings are wet and thick they should be removed by catching or raking. Otherwise they will lie heavily on the lawn and bleach or smother the grass underneath.

If the clippings are longer than ½ inch they should be disposed of. Long clippings do not quickly work down into the lawn but remain on top, turn brown and detract from the color and neatness of the lawn.

Short clippings work down into the turf to form a beneficial mulch, conserving moisture and shading weed seeds. Some will decay, but not all, so too long an accumulation is not good. Part of every spring and fall lawn renovation program should be a brisk raking with a stiff toothed rake to remove this collection of clippings.

Clippings are a valuable addition to the compost heap. Some use them to mulch flower or shrub beds, or garden crops.

WEEDS DOWN—GRASS UP

SIRS:

I used LAWN FOOD plus WEED CONTROL on my lawn in May and again in August with the most satisfactory results. Weeds are gone and the grass looks young and green.

NICHOLAS KOHLER
3223 Division St.,
Spokane, Wash.

Sept. 20, 1947.

SIRS:

Following up my letter of last fall, I am glad to report my lawn this season is the best it has been for several years, and I give the credit to your LAWN FOOD plus WEED CONTROL. Most of my neighbors are using SCOTTS products since they noticed the change in my lawn.

NICHOLAS KOHLER

March 21, 1948

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