

Ample Rains Mean Lush Lawns

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



PHOTO CREDIT: Dr. William M. Johnson

Mowing is a weekly ritual for most lawn owners. Mowing regularly and at the right height are two important criteria for maintaining a healthy beautiful lawn that will also help guarantee that your lawn is the envy of the neighborhood.

A major activity for a lot of homeowners for many weekends to come will be mowing the lawn. Yes, it's that time of the year. With multiple rounds of generous rainfall over the past few weeks, lawnmowers will likely be in full use over the month of July.

Given warm temperatures and ample soil moisture, lawn grasses will enter into

rapid growth stage. There is no doubt about it, while many homeowners consider this a not-so-fun chore, they also likely take pride in how the finished effort adds beauty to the home landscape.

An attractive lawn makes an ideal setting for a home and adds beauty to an area. In addition, a

lawn reduces dust, glare, heat, noise in addition to reducing erosion and surface runoff. A well-maintained lawn also provides a good play area and increases the value of your property.

How many of us are guilty of giving little thought to how we approach this chore—



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simply start the engine and "whack and go." The "whack and go" philosophy won't cut it or, to be more precise, won't cut it right. A lackadaisical approach can result in disappointing results.

The single most important cultural practice to maintaining a beautiful lawn is proper mowing. Poor mowing practices can have many devastating effects on the lawn that no amount of fertilizer, no amount of water, and no amount of pesticides can correct.

The three most common mowing errors are improper cutting height, improper frequency of mowing and mowing with a dull blade.

Turfgrass researchers have identified the ideal cutting height range for each of the turfgrasses we commonly use here for our lawns. The following are recommended cutting heights for turfgrass: St. Augustine grass, 2.5 to 3 inches; common bermudagrass, 1 to 2 inches; and hybrid bermudagrasses, one-half to 1.5 inches. Make sure you know which turfgrass is in your lawn and set your mower accordingly.

If your lawn is shaded or receives heavy use, move the cutting height up a half inch or so from the above ranges. Also, mowing at the highest level of the stated ranges helps conserve water by creating a living mulch, shading the ground and reducing evaporation.

Of equal importance to cutting height is mowing frequency. Associated with mowing frequency is the

somewhat controversial subject of whether or not the clippings should be removed from the lawn.

The frequency at which the lawn should be mowed is dependent on the growth rate of the lawn. A good rule-of-thumb is to remove no more than one-third of the grass height at any one mowing. For example, if you are maintaining your St. Augustine grass at 3 inches, mow the lawn when it is about 4 inches high. Cutting off more than one-third at one time can impede the growth of roots and would require frequent watering during dry summers to keep the plants alive.

If this criterion for mowing frequency is followed, clippings will not need to be removed. The grass clippings simply fall back into the turf and the nutrients they contain (up to 3 percent nitrogen) will be available and recycled for future use by the lawn.

When was the last time you had your mower blade sharpen? Probably the most common violation of the lawn care rules is mowing with a dull blade. If your lawn is blanketed by a sea of jagged, discolored tips a few days after mowing, inspect the mower blade. Blunt blades rip and tear the turf leaving a gray-to-brown appearance to the tips of the shredded lawn. A sharp blade will glide through the turfgrass making mowing easier for you and less traumatic on the lawn.

One of the benefits of proper mowing is weed control. Few weeds can compete with the rapid growth and dense turf of a properly mowed lawn.

I certainly can't blame you if you think mowing the lawn is a chore, but approach the task in a positive manner. Look at it this way—the lawn has to be mowed regularly anyway and the time required to do it properly is about the same as that required to do it improperly. On top of that, proper mowing heights, proper mowing frequency and a sharp blade will help guarantee that your lawn is the envy of the neighborhood.

Upcoming Educational Seminar

Galveston County Master Gardener Monica Martens will provide a seminar entitled *Iris for the Gulf Coast Garden*. Seminar topics will include types of irises that can be grown in local landscapes, tips for growing irises, and where to obtain irises. Monica will also discuss her mishaps and successes with growing irises in her home landscape.

This seminar will be presented on Saturday, July 14, from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. at the Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office located in Carbide Park (4102-B Main St. in La Marque). Pre-registration is required (phone 281-309-5065 or e-mail galvcountrymgs@gmail.com) to ensure the availability of handouts.

