



Grass - Cut It and Leave It

The Environmental Way to Sustainable Lawn Care

During the summer months, grass clippings can account for as much as one-third of the residential solid waste stream in Bergen County. Many people may not realize that **GRASS** is another material that is easily recyclable and right under their feet. By leaving grass clippings on the lawn when you mow, you're letting nature do the recycling for you. By just "cutting it and leaving it" think of the amount of waste that you will be diverting from the solid waste stream, not to mention the tax savings for your town due to lower disposal costs.

The Bergen County Solid Waste Management plan and the Township of Wyckoff's Recycling Ordinance identify grass clippings as recyclable. The Township does not provide a separate grass curbside collection program and therefore, grass clippings are not permitted to be placed at the curb for collection as household garbage. Residents may utilize one of the following four options:

Alternatives

1. **Consider the "Cut It or Leave It" approach**
2. **Have your landscaper take your grass clippings away for recycling**
3. **Bring your grass clippings to the Wyckoff Recycling and Conservation Center** at 476 West Main Street. The Recycling Center has been modified to allow residents (no commercial vehicles) to deposit their grass clippings in a container or simply deposit them on the ground adjacent to the grass container.
4. **Compost your clippings.** Grass clippings are an excellent addition to your backyard leaf compost pile. Mix your grass with flowers, leaves and twigs. Do not add more than one-third grass clippings to your compost pile. If your compost begins to produce odor, add composted leaves to help aerate the grass clippings. Turn the pile over at least once or twice a month to foster decomposition and healthier compost. Compost is great for suppressing weeds and holding in soil moisture. Spread a two to four inch layer around the base of plants, adding new layers over time

How to "Cut It and Leave It"

To maintain your lawn properly, do not cut more than the top third of your lawn so the small clippings will filter down to the soil. Since these clippings will provide a natural fertilizer, your lawn will be healthier. Most New Jersey lawns grow well when they are mowed to about 2 ½ to 3 ½ inches high. The tall grass will shade the soil and cool the grass roots, resulting in a healthier lawn.

- **Mulch clippings into your garden.** Place about an inch of clippings directly on the soil around plantings to moderate soil temperature and weed growth.
- **Incorporate clippings into the soil.** Since most Bergen County soils are low in organic material, mixing grass clippings directly into the garden soil will add valuable organic material.

Saving time and money

Homeowners who leave grass clippings on the lawn will actually reduce their total annual mowing time by 20-25%. You'll save time because you won't have to worry about stopping and bagging your clippings and then bringing the clippings to the curb. You will save money on grass bags and fertilizer while your municipality saves on solid waste disposal costs.

What about Thatch?

Thatch is a tight brown organic layer of living and dead grass roots, stems, and rhizomes that slowly decompose. Grass clippings are made of 95% water, which decompose very rapidly and will not harm your lawn. They DO NOT cause Thatch. Thatch is a result of an over-fertilized lawn. The more you fertilize, the more the thatch grows and the faster it accumulates. And fertilizer contributes to polluted runoff into our storm drains and water systems.

Proper Water Usage

Are you properly watering your lawn? Water the lawn only when and where it's needed. Watering is only necessary when rainfall does not occur for an extended period. The lawn will require much less water when the weather is cool or cloudy. Early morning watering conserves water by preventing evaporation. If the soil has a considerable amount of clay, apply 1 to 1½ inches of water to moisten to a 6-inch depth. Sandy soils hold less water therefore you should apply about ½ inch of water to wet the soil to the 6-inch depth. Use a rain gage or straight-rimmed cup to measure the depth of water applied by sprinklers. It is important to know not only how deep the roots grow, but also how deep your irrigation water penetrates.

Lawn Additives

Many people use additives such as fertilizer, herbicides and insecticides to manage their lawns. These are chemicals and if not handled or used properly can be harmful to the lawn and themselves. Too much fertilizer can cause rapid growth and mowing. Leaving grass clippings helps add nitrogen nutrients to the lawn naturally without over-fertilizing. Too much herbicide can cause burning of the lawn and kill nearby plants and contaminate local waterways through runoff. It's better to evaluate the problems and determine the needs of your lawn. You can contact the Rutgers Cooperative Extension helpline at 201-336-6783 or 201-336-6784 for assistance.

Simple Tips...

- Try purchasing a mulching lawn mower or adding a mulching attachment to your current mower.
- Avoid mowing more than the top third of the growing grass.
- Don't over fertilize your lawn. Most home lawns require three applications of fertilizer per year. To determine specific lawn growing needs, contact your local Rutgers Cooperative Extension Office for a soil test.
- Use the right amount of water
- Compost and re-use your grass clippings

So Simply the Benefits to “Cut It and Leave It” are:

- Grass clippings provide annual nutrients such as nitrogen and potassium for your lawn
- It is less work to mow, pick up and bag clippings
- Keeps grass out of the landfills and reduces solid waste
- Grass can be used in a compost pile for mulch
- Grass clippings don't cause thatch
- Less use of chemicals that can harm our environment

For more information contact:

Township of Wyckoff website at <https://www.wyckoff-nj.com/recycling-trash/pages/recycling-conservation-center>
NJDEP at <http://www.nj.gov/dep/dshw/recycling/Grass%20Cut%20It%20and%20Leave%20It.pdf>
Rutgers Cooperative Extension at <http://bergen.njaes.rutgers.edu/garden/>



