

Environmentally-Friendly Lawn Care

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The lawn is a prominent and important part of the home landscape. Most of us want to maintain an attractive lawn but have as low an impact on the environment as possible. This approach to lawn care is called *Integrated Pest Management*, or IPM for short. When you use IPM techniques, you maximize the use of cultural practices and only use pesticides when needed.

Good cultural practices that reduce weed problems in the lawn include using correct mowing height, effective fertilization, and proper watering.

Mowing a lawn too short can open the lawn to weed invasion. The seeds of many weeds depend on light for germination. A turf that is cut too short allows more light to reach the soil surface, encouraging weed seed germination. Mowing a turf too short usually results in increased weed problems, prompting the homeowner to use more herbicides to control the weed problems.

What is the correct mowing height to maintain a dense, actively-growing turf that is both healthy and attractive? Maintain tall fescue at a 2- to 3-inch mowing height. Kentucky Bluegrass should be maintained at a 2- to 2½-inch mowing height.

Also keep the lawn mower blade sharp. A dull mower blade tears the grass leaf, leaving a ragged appearance. The ragged leaf edges can result in increased disease problems. A clean-cut turf looks better and is healthier.

Proper fertilization is another key to a healthy turfgrass. Fertilizers give the lawn good turf color and density. With effective fertilization, grass growth will be rapid enough to discourage weed invasion. Use a slow-release form of nitrogen for a

more uniform turf growth over a longer period of time. This approach avoids large flushes of growth over a short period of time that can result in excess grass clippings.

Insects are another problem in lawns. There are basically two types of insects that feed on lawn grasses — surface feeders (such as sod webworms) and root feeders (such as white grubs). A properly maintained lawn will be more tolerant of insect damage. Monitor insect problems in your lawn. A low population of insects may not cause enough damage to the turf to justify control. Avoid applying pesticides as a preventive approach; treat only when the pest needs to be controlled for the health of the turf.

Diseases also affect the health of a lawn. Diseases are usually a result of a lawn ecosystem being thrown out of balance by stresses such as high temperatures combined with too much water or fertilizer. The time of day that water is applied and the frequency and amount of water applied are very important management practices to minimize disease problems.

Most lawns need about 1 inch of water each week. Water the lawn early in the morning while dew is still present. That way, you are not increasing the amount of time that moisture is present on the turf. If early morning watering is not possible, water late in the afternoon, allowing plenty of time for the lawn to dry before evening dew appears.

If areas of the turf die out from disease, have the disease identified. Then, re-seed with a grass cultivar that has resistance to that disease problem.