

# GRASSCYCLE!

## Leave the clippings for a healthier, easy to care for lawn

Grasscycling, or mulch-mowing, means leaving the clippings on the lawn to feed the soil. Grasscycling saves time. (No more bagging clippings and dragging them to the curb!) It also reduces waste, reduces irrigation and fertilizer needs, and makes lawns greener and healthier. Give it a try!

### The facts about Grasscycling

Scientific trials and turf professionals have shown that mulch mowing:

- Doesn't cause thatch buildup
- Improves spring green-up, and lawns stay green longer in dry summer conditions
- Improves soil and lawn health and resistance to disease
- Can contribute up to half of your lawn's annual fertilizer needs, reducing fertilizer costs and water pollution. Lawns on healthy soil may need no fertilizer.
- Reduces total mowing, bagging, and disposal time by 40%!

### You can grasscycle with any mower

(see tips below). But when it's time to shop for a new mower, try a **mulching lawn mower** (see back for what to look for when shopping for a mulching mower). Good mulch-mowers blow the clippings down into your lawn where they decompose and fertilize the lawn quickly, and won't be tracked into the house. Mulch-mowers will leave a clean lawn year-round, as long as you mow every five to seven days during the spring, and slow down when mowing through overgrown patches.

### Grasscycling Tips

- Mow when the grass is dry, to avoid clumping.
- Set cutting height up to 2 to 2½ inches to hide clippings better, and make a healthier lawn.
- Try to remove only one-third of grass length per mowing.
- If the grass is very overgrown, mow twice: first at a high setting, then wait a few days and mow lower.
- Mow every five to seven days in the spring. (Every two weeks may be enough in the summer.) You'll still save time over bagging and dragging clippings to the curb.
- Water and fertilize less. Don't fertilize in spring – wait until fall, to promote root growth, not top growth. Remember, every time you Grasscycle you add free fertilizer to your lawn.
- Sharpen mower blades twice a year.



Clippings from a conventional mower on left; and from a modern mulching mower on right.



Push mowers (left) and conventional power mowers (right) leave clippings scattered on the surface, where they break down in a week or so. Modern electric and gas mulching mowers (center) blow mulched clippings down to the ground, making free fertilizer and leaving a clean-looking lawn.

## A Shopping Guide to Mulching Lawn Mowers

### Shopping for a mulching lawn mower

This guide will help you find a grasscycling mower that's right for you. For up-to-date ratings of mulch-mower performance consult recent spring issues of Consumer Reports, available at your local library. You can also use your library card number to log on to the [Consumer Reports website](http://www.consumerreports.org) for free from the Seattle Public Library website [www.spl.org](http://www.spl.org) (click on "Articles & Research" and then "Consumer Reports").

### Push Mowers

Not only are push mowers quiet, non-polluting and inexpensive, they do a good job of grasscycling. One disadvantage is that they can't chop and blow the clippings down into the turf like a power mulching mower. But you can always rake up the areas where clippings might be tracked into the house. Grass clippings make great compost and mulch.

Push mowers are sold in most local hardware stores, as well as big department and discount stores. Quality of construction varies with price, so comparison shop. Test the handle for stiffness, strong attachment to the mower, and comfortable hand grips. Compare the ease of height adjustment, and look for smooth, sharp blade edges. Higher priced mowers often have six blades rather than five, to cut more smoothly.

Yard sales may yield a fine old push mower, which can be reconditioned and sharpened by a mower repair shop. Or check out local hardware stores or mower repair shops. Many of them sell reconditioned mowers at about half the new price. Repair shops can also sharpen blades for you. Remember, sharp blades cut cleaner, easier, and leave your lawn healthier and better looking.

### Electric Mulching Mowers

Electric mowers are much quieter than gas models, and there's no smelly exhaust and no problem disposing of used oil or old fuel. If you can mow weekly in the spring, you'll probably never need to bag or rake. For small yards, an electric mower with a cord may be the perfect grasscycling machine. For bigger yards, the cordless electric mowers (with rechargeable batteries) may be worth the extra cost. In general, electric mowers are not as powerful as gas mowers, so they usually have slightly shorter blades and will have to be pushed a little slower in overgrown, wet grass. But they're easy to start, easy on your ears, and good for our air quality too!

### Gas Mulching Mowers

Mulching mowers generally have more powerful engines than conventional mowers, because it takes extra power to re-cut clippings into mulch. Mowers that are designed to mulch will grasscycle much better than conventional bagging mowers that are converted to mulching. Most mulching models are convertible for bagging. Self-propelled and riding mulching mowers are also available. For cleaner air, avoid 2-cycle engines — look for 4-cycle mowers that meet the California EPA pollution standards. And try to run the tank dry when you stop mowing in the fall, to avoid having to dispose of hazardous gasoline. Call 1-800-RECYCLE to learn about recycling used motor oil.



Commercial mulching mower at work. Whatever your yard size or budget, there's a mulching mower for you!

### Grasscycling with a conventional mower

You can grasscycle with your old non-mulching lawn mower. If it's a rear-discharge bagging mower, remove the bag and cover the discharge chute.

(Most rear-baggers have a cover that drops down when the bag is removed, to protect you from flying rocks.)

Clippings will be held under the deck to be re-chopped, and then dropped on the lawn. If you have a side-discharge mower with a deflector that sprays clippings out as you mow, simply mow in a pattern that spreads clippings uniformly on the lawn. While you can buy special "mulching" blades, tests show that you'll get the best mulching performance just by keeping your existing blade sharp. See the *Grasscycling Tips* on front page for more suggestions on how to grasscycle successfully with any mower.