THE ULTIMATE MOWING GUIDE



LAWN ASSOCIATION

“I USE A REALLY EXPENSIVE MOWER BUT NEVER GET THE SAME LOOK YOU SEE IN GARDENING MAGAZINES”

“I JUST DO ONE BIG CUT EVERY THREE WEEKS TO ENCOURAGE BETTER GROWTH. IS THIS RIGHT?”

“MY GARDEN’S TOO BIG FOR AN ELECTRIC MOWER BUT I DON’T WANT TO KEEP USING MY DIRTY PETROL MOWER.



“SHOULD I STOP MOWING IN THE WINTER?”

This is just a sample of the typical concerns that keen gardeners have about mowing. And the answers to them all come back to one crucial question – why do we mow? Understanding what mowing actually does leads to a much greater appreciation for what goes into good mowing – and it is guaranteed to lead to happier healthier grass. The beautiful striped finish, if that’s your goal, is really just the icing on the cake
and the reward for taking the time to learn all about good mowing.

At the end of this guide you’ll find some great insider tips from the pros on getting that perfect mown finish. Our chief goal, however, is to give you a greater understanding of what you’re doing and why – because that knowledge is the gateway to good mowing. And to do this we’re going to address the important questions.

Take your time to read this guide, and remember, good mowing is a skill. It’s not difficult, but it takes practice and patience. The rewards, however, are well worth it – and your grass will really thank you for your efforts too!

Happy Mowing!

David Hedges-Gower
Chairman of The Lawn Association

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Introduction

WHAT IS MOWING?

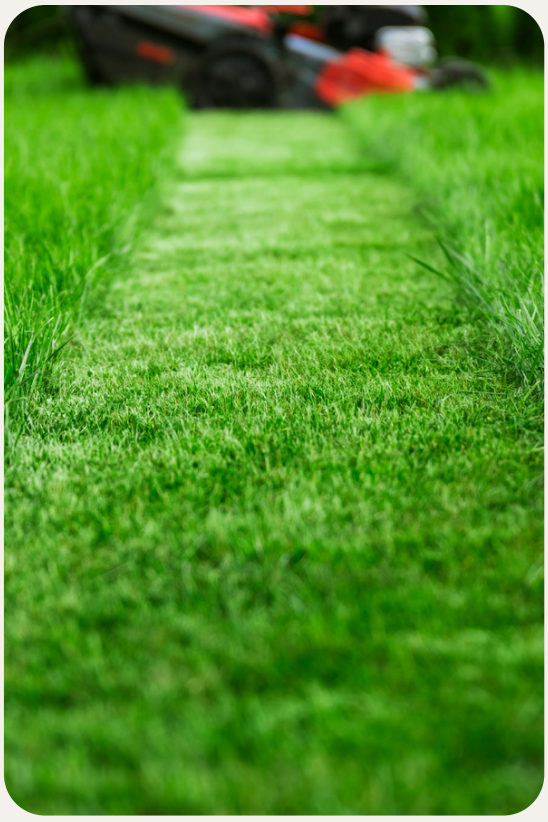
Mowing is the principle way of regularly pruning the grass plants in the lawn. Scarification also prunes by cutting the shoots and stolons, but mowing is both a simpler and much more frequent way of pruning.

Discussion

Why would you bother pruning such a simple plant?

The explanation lies in another question – "what is the best sign of well-mown grass?" And the answer is not the shortness, although a clean and even cut is indeed a good result. No...

... the best sign of good mowing is healthier grass, witnessed both by the manner in which it grows back and in the general condition of your lawn.



/ˈpruːnɪŋ/ /ˈpruːnɪŋ/ - the activity of cutting off some of the branches from a tree, bush, etc. so that it will grow better and stronger.
Oxford Learner's Dictionary

WHAT IS MOWING?

So, as with any other garden plant, we prune grass in order to improve the shape and to maintain a healthy growing environment.

"Does this mean that the BETTER I mow, the FASTER the grass will grow?"

Not exactly, as it less to do with the rate of growth than with the overall health. You can cut regularly but badly, and it will show. It will grow unevenly; thin patches may appear; and the lawn may shows signs of malnourishment, moss and disease.

By contrast, a well-cut, (i.e. well-pruned) lawn may not grow noticeably faster but it will grow better and remain healthier.

So, keep thinking about 'pruning'

People who prune prize roses and ornamental trees spend time assessing carefully how to do it; they're judging its current shape and condition and how best to encourage healthier growth and condition. I'm not suggesting that you do this every time you mow, but I do want you to remember, as you walk or ride up and down your lawn, that you share the same ultimate goal – well-pruned and well-growing plants.

The cut you do today is not just for now but to help maintain the health of the lawn for the weeks and months ahead.

Read on and discover the art of good lawn pruning...



1.

WHAT IS CRUCIAL FOR GOOD MOWING?



Sharp mower blades!

Having talked about pruning, this will now be clear. No sensible gardener prunes valued plants with blunt shears. And the same goes for grass mowing/pruning.

Discussion

There are two ways to mow a blade of grass – by cutting and by tearing. One is clinical and precise; the other is rough and stressful to the plant.

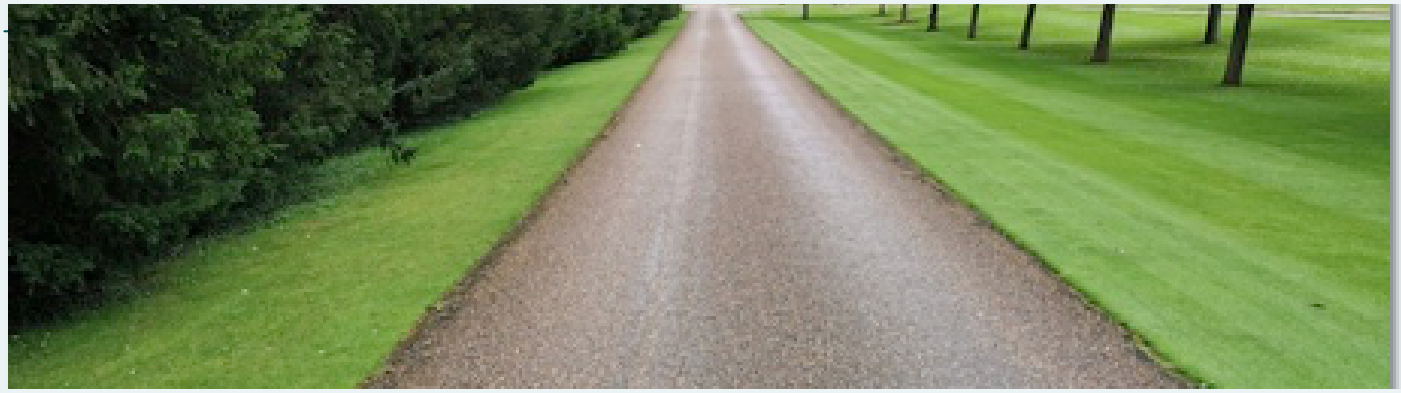
When you tear or rip the top off a blade of grass, you can actually see the uneven torn edges. For a high quality luxury lawn this will be aesthetically unacceptable. But for any lawn it can spell trouble. Within a few days you might notice those rough, torn dead ends turning brown as they dry (see photo).



Torn grass can be more susceptible to disease too. You'll notice a white tinge across the grass if it's in trouble. So, a sharp blade and clean cut are more essential to good mowing than anything else. You can read about sharpening blades in Section 6.

WHAT IS CRUCIAL FOR GOOD MOWING?

... the effects of good and bad mowing (and blade sharpness) on the health of the grass!



Either side of this driveway is identical turf. The left side, being perimeter land, is mown too short and using a poorly- maintained blade. The right side, however, is mown well by a professional using a sharp-bladed mower.

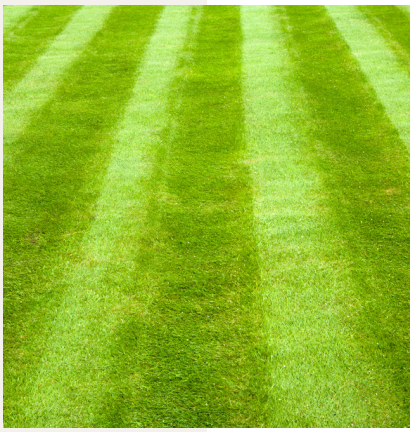
Seen up close, the comparison in lawn health (moss, colour, sward) is striking:





1. WHAT TYPE OF MOWER SHOULD I USE?

The answer depends on your garden, its contours and terrain, and on the type of lawn you want.



It also depends to some extent on how much mower maintenance you are prepared to commit to.
At its simplest, for a utility lawn you do best with a rotary mower – simple, rugged and with blades that are easy to sharpen or replace. For a higher quality lawn you may prefer a cylinder mower – a much finer cut, but with higher purchase and maintenance cost (as well a more intensive lawn care programme).



There are many considerations when choosing a mower:

- Budget
- Type of lawn
- Walk-behind or sit-on
- Do you want stripes?
- Do you want to be 'green'?
- Can you recycle the cuttings?
- Can you service the mower yourself?



And for some, the machine's appearance matters too – and why not if you're spending a handsome sum and want to look professional in your garden?

WHAT TYPE OF MOWER SHOULD I USE?

So, let's start with the simplest decision – rotary vs cylinder.

ROTARY MOWERS



This is the type that most people have, whether an enormous ride-on tractor or a small hover model for a tiny front lawn. Some are pushed, others self-propelled.

As you can see, the rotary mower has a single blade which is fixed centrally to the underneath of the mowing deck. The blade usually has cutting zones at both ends, and spins at high speed to cut the grass.

The mowing deck can be raised or lowered to adjust the height of the cut. The underside is shaped to maximise the airflow that propels the clippings into the grass box at the rear (when in use).

The rotary mower's design renders it useful for most types of lawn, and especially for rougher or more uneven areas. Some have wheels at the front and a heavy roller at the back to create a striped effect; others have four wheels, giving slightly easier manoeuvrability. We consider power sources further below.

Rotary mowers can be good value for money but, like any machinery, need routine servicing to continue working at their best.

Please note, a well-maintained rotary mower with a sharp blade will give you a good, clean cut but it cannot replicate the extremely fine results obtained from cylinder mowing. So, if you are seeking that bowling-green finish, and are keeping up a good lawn care programme, you may well prefer a cylinder mower.



CYLINDER MOWERS



The first mower, invented in 1827 by Edward Budd, was a cylinder mower, and the basic design remains unchanged. Indeed, if you want the simplest type of unpowered, hand-pushed mower, it will be a cylinder mower! But the serious cylinder mower is a sophisticated machine. It cuts with a low-set adjustable cylinder of angled blades at the front that rotates rapidly against a fixed strip of metal (the bottom blade), creating a scissor action that slices cleanly through the grass.





The grass collection box is attached up front, whilst at the rear most models have a heavy roller to create high-quality stripes in the finely-cut grass.

Cylinder mowers can cut much finer and shorter than rotaries, which is why you'll see them being used in university quadrangles, tennis clubs, bowling greens, football pitches, etc where the finest finish is required. However, using a cylinder mower does not by itself give you a better lawn – that comes down to your comprehensive lawn care programme!

As with rotary mowers, their cylinder cousins come in all sizes, with a ride-on option for medium to large machines, and even battery-powered models too.



WHAT TYPE OF MOWER SHOULD I USE?

There are other differences to consider when selecting your type of mower:

CYLINDER VS ROTARY

CYLINDER	ROTARY
• Prefer to cut shorter grass	• Tend to scalp short grass
• Mean more frequent mowing	• Can be used less frequently
• Use much sharper blades (but are trickier to sharpen)	• Cannot cut as sharply as a cylinder (but blades are easier to sharpen)
• Require a much flatter surface	• Can cope better with uneven surfaces
• Require a stricter maintenance programme	• Require less mainetance work
• Prefer a fine grass mixture with shorter length	• Can maintain most types of lawns

Another benefit of the cylinder mower, however, is the option of verti-cutting...

'Verti-cutting' is a light scarification technique, not unlike vertical mowing.



Verti- cut blades



Verti-cutting prunes the sideways growing stolons

VERTI-CUTTING



You can see where the vertical blades have sliced through the lateral shoots, creating these straight lines

Unlike a scarifier, these blades do not penetrate the thatch at such deep levels but they do remove the dead and dying grass that would otherwise create more thatch, and mean you can give your grass this additional light prune between your main scheduled scarifications.

MULCHING MOWERS

You can buy special mowers (or blades for a rotary mower) that mulch the clippings very finely before returning them to the lawn. There they can be quickly broken down by soil micro-organisms, releasing nutrients back into the soil. Mulching also has a much simpler function – disposing of the cuttings if you are unable to compost or recycle them!

A mulching mower is like a rotary, but the blades have cutting edges along the whole length, not just at the ends. This, along with a faster rotation speed (in purpose-made mulching mowers), means that the initial cuttings get cut even finer as they fly around the cutting chamber, and are finally forced back into the sward.



You can opt for a mulching attachment to go on an ordinary rotary mower for occasional mulch mowing. Just be aware that mulching attachments do not cut the clippings as finely and are really only any good for occasional mulching.



If you don't have somewhere like this to compost your grass, you might be tempted by a mulching mower. Be aware, however, that with a full-time mulching mower you will have to cut more regularly, especially during the growing season.

ROBOTIC MOWERS



The idea of an environmentally-friendly mowing machine that does it all for you while you're living your life sounds great doesn't it?

Robotic mowers are programmable machines. powered by rechargeable batteries, that quietly go around mowing your lawn all by themselves.

The principle is fine in one important way – they do something we usually cannot, and that is to mow extremely regularly, giving your lawn a daily prune. This is great for the grass providing the mower is set up for the lightest of cuts.

However, there are downsides to consider before investing in this easy- life solution, shortcomings that might actually reduce the condition of your lawn:

- They will continue to cut in the rain unless you intervene
- They don't collect fallen leaves
- They can spread disease
- You still have to sharpen blades
- They don't (yet) give you stripes
- They don't work on uneven ground
- They easily get themselves stuck
- You must install a hidden wire which defines the cutting zones
- And finally, they need a 'charging house' to retreat to for recharging – and this needs to be connected to the electricity mains.

So, is this the perfect solution to modern mowing? Maybe not. But if you really don't have time to mow regularly yourself and are prepared to maintain and monitor the robot appropriately, then these little machines can help you to enjoy a healthy and well-kept lawn.

2. WHAT TYPE OF MOWER SHOULD I USE?

POWER SOURCE

Just a few decades ago, the choice of power was a three- way split between simple push mowers (where the blades turn when you push), petrol-engined mowers or electric mowers. Today, however, we also have battery technology and it is growing more advanced (and slowly becoming cheaper) all the time. The good news is that battery- powered mowers can now be found right across the domestic range, from small cylinders to pretty rugged rotaries.

With lithium iron batteries, a 40-minute non-stop mow is perfectly possible. Stiga, for example, produce a range that includes models capable of cutting up to 1000m2 on a single charge.

Of the traditional power sources, petrol remains the most versatile option, especially if you can keep a top-up petrol can within safe reach. Electric mowers are (usually) quieter than petrol and very convenient for smaller areas, but you must consider the risk posed by the trailing power cord (and always use a circuit breaker).

COST

he price range for mowers is huge, going from less than fifty pounds for a small electric rotary to well into five figures for a professional cylinder mower, and with the higher quality tractor mowers falling somewhere in between. So, even if you have a generous budget, how do you know how much you need to spend?

The answer depends on the finish you are trying to achieve, your lawn type and size, and to some extent how much you are prepared to pay on mower maintenance. This last point is important because, as with a luxury car, if you buy the best but don't pay the upkeep, you'll soon find performance suffering.

A final thought on choosing the right mower...

The most important consideration is not what sort of machine you choose, but how well you maintain it. And given the critical need for sharp blades, this may be the most relevant issue for you.

3. HOW OFTEN SHOULD I MOW AND HOW SHORT?

These are two separate questions but their answers are so interrelated that it is important to address them together. And those answers come from your lawn.

HOW OFTEN?

Mow as often as the lawn's growing behaviour (i.e. length) requires it. Remember, however, that the more frequently you mow (and at the correct height), the more you are rewarded with a thicker sward.

HOW SHORT?

The guiding principle is that of good pruning – it's for the ongoing health of the plant, not just for immediate aesthetic appearance. What you do each time you mow impacts further down the line on your lawn's overall health and condition.

Discussion

HOW OFTEN?

Keeping a lawn in tip-top condition requires regular mowing (once every two weeks or less), but with the cutting height adjusted to reflect the current growing rate.

Here's what you risk if you don't mow regularly:

- Mowing irregularly will give you soft, under-developed plants, with less colour, that should not be cut lower than at least 50mm
- Mowing irregularly and leaving the clippings will mean you have to cut even higher so that the clippings don't smother the remaining grass
- Mowing irregularly, especially if too short, risks a thin, straggly lawn as all the plant strength ends up in the compost bin.

MONTH	CUTS per month
January	1-2
February	1-2
March	2-4
April	2-4
May	4-8
June	4-8
July	4-8
August	4-8
September	2-6
October	2-4
November	1-4
December	1-2

You can follow this guide, subject to the weather and your fertilizing schedule (and the level of nitrogen added), but remember to adjust the cutting height to reflect how much or little your lawn is actually growing.

3. HOW OFTEN SHOULD I MOW AND HOW SHORT?

You must remember that grass plants store a large part of their nutrients in their leaves. So ...



Discussion

HOW SHORT?

Each time you mow, you are stealing from their larder. This is why people often refer to the rule of thumb never to cut more than one third of the current leaf length.

And this is why, if you are trying to tidy up a lawn that has been left uncut for too long, you must do it in stages over a period of time, gradually reducing the cutting height each time.

Cutting height will also vary in dry conditions (and depend on whether or not you have an irrigation system to promote good growth when there's no rain).

But, as we'll now discover, cutting heights also depend on the predominant species of grass in your lawn ...

HOW OFTEN SHOULD I MOW AND HOW SHORT?

GRASS SPECIES

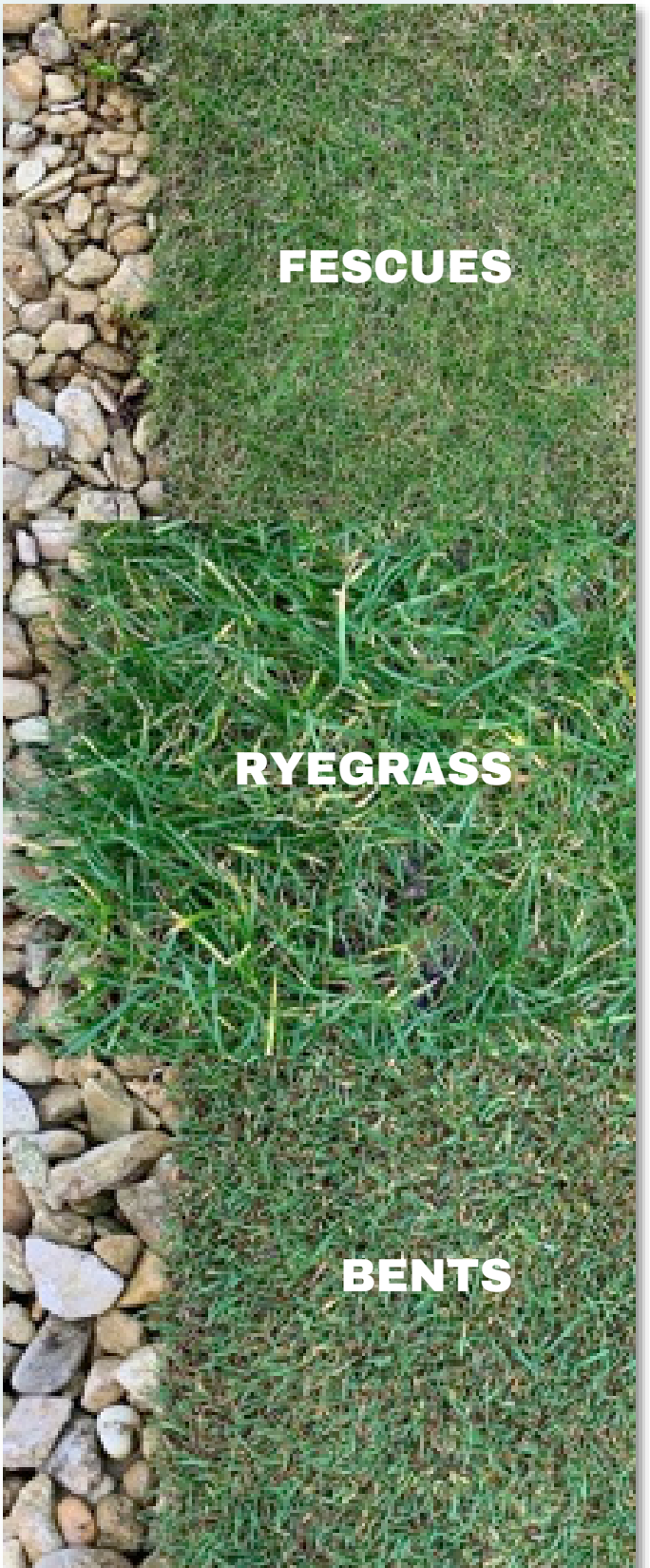
Most lawns have either predominantly bents and fescues (traditional native grasses) or dwarf ryegrass. These two types grow differently (see photo) and hence tolerate/need slightly different cutting heights. I'll explain this first and then you can examine a table giving you guidelines.

BENT & FESCUE LAWNS

These native grasses, found in lawns across the UK, can withstand much shorter cutting than ryegrass.

However, cutting too short can generate too much dead material, adding to your thatch layer. Conversely if left too long, the resulting longer shoots and leaves also eventually increase the thatch.

So, with this traditional type of lawn, choose your height plan and try to stick to it, remembering that regular mowing will encourage the dense growing habit so valued in these species.



GRASS SPECIES

MAJORITY DWARF RYEGRASS LAWNS

Bred deliberately for the domestic lawn, this species isn't necessarily easier to maintain, just different:

- The characteristic deep green colour is in the leaf blade, so removing too much can diminish the appearance
- When left slightly longer, it has a lush thickness, ideal for a hard-wearing lawn
- Dwarf ryegrass is a more abrasive plant, so you will need to sharpen your mower blade more regularly.

Dwarf ryegrass is often used in public areas to patch existing grass – but as this photo shows, it does not blend in well, especially when poorly-sown.



CUTTING HEIGHTS

SUGGESTED CUTTING HEIGHTS & TIMES OF YEAR

NB: remember to raise the cutting height when about to go into a period of hot and dry conditions.

	Bents and fescues	Dwarf ryegrass
	High-quality lawn (possibly cylinder)	
Spring	15-20mm	20-30mm
Summer	10-20mm	15-25mm
Autumn	15-25mm	20-25mm
Winter	20-35mm	25-30mm
	Medium quality lawn (rotary)	
Spring	20-35mm	20-30mm
Summer	20-25mm	20-25mm
Autumn	20-30mm	25-35mm
Winter	20-35mm	30-40mm
	Low quality lawn (rotary)	
Spring	30-50mm	35-50mm
Summer	30-50mm	35-50mm
Autumn	30-50mm	35-50mm
Winter	30-50mm	35-50mm

4. ARE THERE RULES FOR MOWING AT DIFFERENT TIMES OR THE DAY& THE YEAR?

Yes. A combination of the prevailing conditions and the natural behaviour of the grass means that there are definitely good and bad times (and ways) to be mowing.



Discussion

Sometimes a sharp blade isn't enough by itself to guarantee a clean cut. The weather plays its part too. So at certain times of the year you may need to factor this in when planning your mowing sessions. Let's look first at mowing in different seasons.



Mowing by season

Many people ask if they need to mow in the winter. Well, there was a time when our weather patterns were reliable and predictable, but not any longer. So the basic message is ...

. . . "if the grass doesn't stop growing, you don't stop mowing".

However, there are seasonal guidelines that we should still follow through the year in our mowing regimes:

4. ARE THERE RULES FOR MOWING AT DIFFERENT TIMES OR THE DAY& THE YEAR?

SPRING



It's the most exciting season for lawn owners - a winter of cold, damp, wet or even snowy conditions finally gives way to the first growth of the season.

So what do YOU do?

Many take out their mower, still set at the last cutting height they last used, press 'start' and go. But this first cut is such an important one - go in too short in a single cut and you'll immediately put the lawn under stress.



Instead, start by 'topping' off the lawn at a higher height of cut than normal, and in successive cuts over the next few weeks/months gradually reduce the height down to its optimum level.

N.B. Spring growth is really important to the grass plants – and pruning it regularly helps it to develop good thickness. So, cut as often as it demands, not just when it suits you. Use this growing period to strengthen the lawn for the months ahead.

4. ARE THERE RULES FOR MOWING AT DIFFERENT TIMES OR THE DAY& THE YEAR?

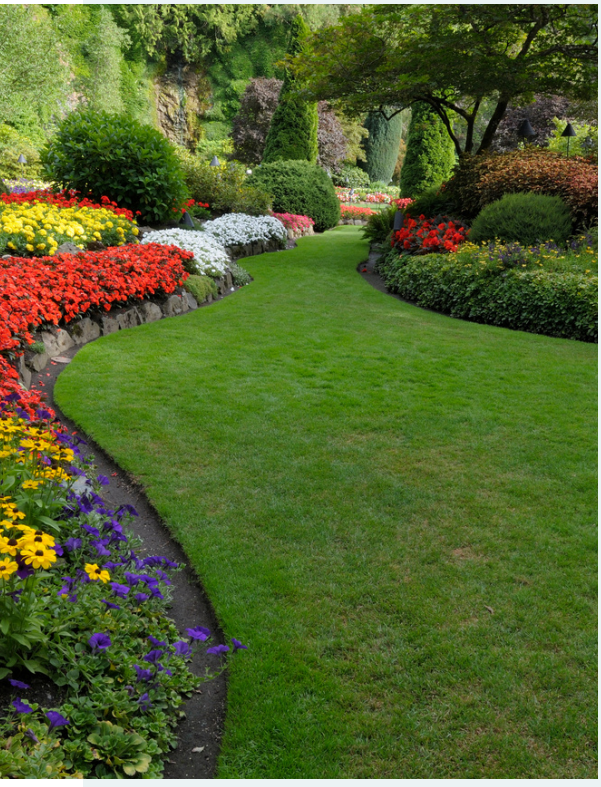
SUMMER

This is the time when lawns can be under stress, especially as summer droughts become more commonplace. So, we need to fight our instinct to maintain a very short summer lawn ...



... and yes, even if we're using a cylinder mower!

So, instead of lowering the cutting height, raise it a little. Raising the height of cut will also help preserve the canopy function of the grass that protects the precious soils as temperatures rise.



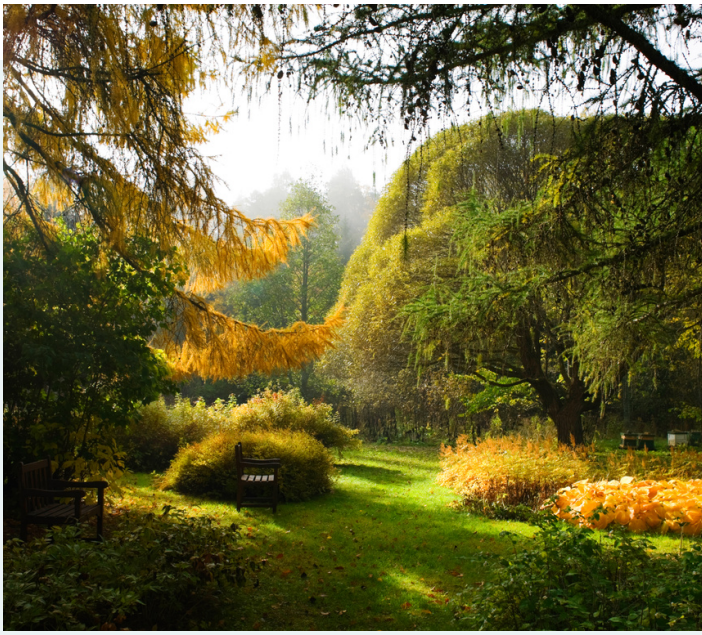
And - it is more important than ever to use sharp blades to avoid tearing the grass and causing additional stress.

Finally, during warm spells, put the clippings back into the lawn (by mowing without the grass box) to return some moisture and nutrients.

Remember, summer is all about protecting your grass as best you can.

4. ARE THERE RULES FOR MOWING AT DIFFERENT TIMES OR THE DAY& THE YEAR?

AUTUMN



After a dry summer, autumn brings welcome colour back into the lawn. Enjoy it, but bear in mind that autumn is also essential preparation time for winter which will bring slowed growth, possible snow, rain and much colder conditions.

So, as you're reaching the end of Autumn (whenever that may be nowadays), slowly raise the height as you go through the months of September and October. This will help the plants to gain valuable strength ready for going into the winter months.

WINTER



Despite your autumn preparation, winter may not bring the sharp and cold conditions we used to expect. And so the grass may continue to grow. This makes it tricky to know whether or not to mow.

If you are getting some winter growth, you need to mow (so that the grass doesn't become too leggy and encourage disease), but with some considerations:

- Raise the height as high as you want to, so that you're just topping off the grass with a clean, sharp cut. It can do wonders and make the lawn look great too.

- Don't cut when the soil is too wet (for example, after rainfall) especially with a roller or cylinder mower. This will cause smearing, and will increase soil compaction.

- Don't cut when there is frost or snow. However, Mowing before a forecast frost is not a problem as long as your blade is really sharp.

- Always use the grass box. You don't want clippings in the lawn as at this time of year; taking longer to break down, they will sit on the surface for many weeks, causing stress and possible disease conditions.

- Keep leaves off the lawn. You can remove them with a mower and grass box, but make sure the soils are as dry as possible. Do not mulch the clippings back into the lawn.

4. ARE THERE RULES FOR MOWING AT DIFFERENT TIMES OR THE DAY& THE YEAR?

TIMES OF THE DAY FOR MOWING

Spring & Autumn

During these seasons you can safely mow at any time of day without compromising the cut, as long as the blade is sharp and the conditions are reasonably dry.



Summer

Extreme heat can damage newly cut grass leaves, so mowing is best done during the cooler mornings where possible.

WINTER

Moisture is the big issue during winter, with damp grass harder to cut cleanly and wet clippings all too easily clogging up your machine. Try to avoid the mornings to allow heavy dew to evaporate. Alternatively, you can first remove as much water as possible using a broom, a blower or even by dragging a hosepipe down the two sides of your lawn.

5.

SHOULD I COORDINATE MOWING WITH OTHER LAWN CARE JOBS?



Yes, you should follow important guidelines because otherwise your mowing can undermine what you're trying to achieve with your other lawn care jobs.

Discussion

There has always been a lot of debate about how to coordinate mowing with other lawn care: How long before I can mow after applying a feed and herbicide? What about after seeding?

Here's a simple guide to help you out.

Herbicides & Weed Control

As most weeds adapt to the height you've been mowing to, mow on a high cut and the day before you apply a herbicide product. Then always leave mowing after application for at least 2-3 days – or for longer if it has been raining (or you are cutting without a grass box).

Scarification

Prior to scarification, mow your lawn one or two notches lower than normal so that the scarifier can remove thatch easier. And following scarification, mow again once at the same reduced height, before raising to the normal level to promote renewed plant health.

Aeration

Prior to hollow tine aeration, mow your lawn one notch lower – the shorter grass makes it easier to clear the cores of soil after aerating. Then resume normal mowing height as soon as possible.

Over-Seeding

Prior to over-seeding, mow your lawn one to two notches lower than normal. This is to put stress on the existing grass, which sounds strange but is intended to slow it down, giving the germinated seedlings more time, light and air to establish while the mature grass recovers. When the seeds have germinated, mow after about 14 days but on a very high setting to avoid cutting the seedlings. After another 20-30 days you can begin to lower the cutting height again.

Newly-turfed lawns:

You want to give the new turf time to 'knit in'. To allow this, don't mow for 10-20 days after laying. You can check if the turf is ready for mowing by gently trying to lift some turf with your fingers. If it doesn't lift, you're ready to go.

Lawn Fertilising

After feeding with granular fertiliser, don't mow for 3 to 4 days (longer if there's very little moisture) to allow the fertiliser to break down. And if using a polymer-coated fertilizer, you may have to mow with grass box off so that the fertilizer stays in the grass for longer.
as soon as possible.

6. HOW DO I SHARPEN MY MOWER BLADE?

You can easily remove and sharpen a rotary blade with a file or even an angle grinder. Sharpening a cylinder blade, however, is much trickier and best left to a mower mechanic.

Discussion

Blade sharpening can be relatively simple or rather complex, depending on the type of mowing machine you have – and it therefore also influences the type that you choose to buy!

There are two considerations – knowing when the blade needs sharpening, and knowing how to do it. First, the answers in brief:

When does my blade need sharpening?

The true answer is whenever it is beginning to blunt. And of course that happens the moment you begin to use it.

How do I sharpen it?

It's relatively simple with a rotary blade, but if you have a cylinder mower, you get a professional to do it.

IN DETAIL:

With a cylinder mower, you can test the sharpness each time you mow by tilting and carefully feeding a piece of paper between the cylinder and the bottom blade as you slowly turn the cylinder. A sharp blade will cut the paper cleanly; a blunt one will probably jam up, much like a printer. Be careful not to slice your fingers!

A cylinder blade should be sharpened by a professional. Fortunately, however, a well-set-up cylinder mower's blade may only need sharpening once a year as the scissor mechanism maintains a sharp cut for much longer than the rotary mower's blade.

The rotary blade has a less sophisticated cutting design, relying on speed and the single blade to cut. And like any knife, it begins to blunt the moment you begin to use it.

Clearly, a once-a-year sharpen is no good for a rotary blade. And in fact, if you're serious about good mowing, you should actually be sharpening it every 1-4 weeks from March onwards. But don't despair! The cutting ends of a rotary blade are exactly the same as any sharp knife, and you sharpen them very easily in the same way. However, always detach the blade from the machine, and handle with great care!

You can, of course, keep one or two spare blades so that a blunt blade doesn't hold up your mowing schedule.

6. HOW DO I SHARPEN MY MOWER BLADE?

The most important aspect of blade removal and replacement is your safety. Even a bunt blade can give you a serious injury. So please take careful notice of all the safety instructions below.

01 Disconnect the spark plug (or electric cord) to prevent unintentional running of the motor.

02 Put on thick protective gloves.

03 You need to tilt the mower to get access to the blade, but without spilling any oil over the engine or grass. One way to do this is to tilt it up at the front until the pushing handle rests on the grass at the back. Whichever way you tilt it, be sure to prop the mower securely in position.

04 Take note of how the blade is sitting – you'll need to line it up at the same angle when you reattach it.

05 Use a piece of wood to 'lock' the blade in position ready for loosening the bolt.

06 Undo the bolt, being careful not to lose any washers.

07 Remove the wooden block and carefully remove the blade.

To attach the blade, secure the mower as before, then align the blade as it was previously. Remember to use any washers or mounting bits, and then insert the piece of wood to stop the blade from moving. Tighten the bolt, ideally following the manufacturer's torque wrench guide if possible.

You don't want any loose play, but avoid over- tightening as this can warp the blade.

Finally, carefully return the mower to the upright position and leave 30-60 minutes for the oil to settle (check oil levels before starting).

7. HOW DO I LOOK AFTER MY MOWER?

Make sure you have a professional service at least once a year (or learn how to do this yourself). However, it is a good idea to do some routine maintenance on a more regular basis, outlined below.



Discussion

PRE MOWING CHECKS

Petrol Mowers

- Check fuel and oil levels. Top up as required.
- Check the spark plug. If you are having trouble starting
- The mower, get it serviced or, in the short-term, replace
- The spark plug.
- Inspect your air filter. Replace when necessary.
- Check your blade for sharpness.

And every so often these are well worth doing too:

1. Check your lawn mower height settings. If your mower presents these as inch or centimeter heights, check these against a ruler as the adjuster can loosen and show a false reading.
2. Lubricate the moving parts, wheels, etc with lubricating fluid (e.g. WD40).

7. HOW DO I LOOK AFTER MY MOWER?

Discussion

ELECTRIC MOWERS

Follow the same steps as above, where relevant, AND examine the cabling for any damage (with the power supply disconnected).



Post-Mowing Checks

Follow the steps below:

- Clean the underneath – use a brush, scraper, hose or pressure washer. The underside is designed to maximise the airflow that sends the clippings to the grass box. Any material sticking to the underside will hamper this. Disconnect electric mowers first.
- Start the motor after cleaning to ensure smooth running.
- Top up fuel ready for next time (petrol models only).
- Check any moving parts for loose bolts etc.
- Replace a blunt blade with a sharp spare if you have one.
- Clean out the grass box and allow it to dry.

Every so often you can also lubricate any bolts to prevent them from seizing up.



You can see how the airflow has cleared most of the clippings at the back, but the front needs a good clean.

8. MOWING AWKWARD AREAS

Awkward areas – slopes, busy walkways, shady spots etc - can suffer in two ways: 1) we mow them badly, or 2) we avoid mowing as much as possible. Either way is wrong as grass in tricky places is often already stressed – what it really needs is some regular and appropriate pruning to help it retain its strength.

BANKS AND SLOPES



The main issue with mowing on a slope is safety! Expect to work much harder to control the mower (and avoid a sit-on machine if possible on a steep slope). From the grass's perspective, however, the challenge with slopes is getting an even cut.

The steeper your bank or slope, the easier it is to scalp the grass unintentionally. The mower will sit more heavily on one side, especially on softer ground, and cut shorter as a result. The solution is simple – raise the cutting height at least one notch higher than you are cutting on the flat. Yes, the grass on the slope will be fractionally longer than the rest of the lawn, but with no scalping the overall visual impression will be more consistent and even.



SHADY AREAS

Why would you want to mow a shady area any differently to an open area?

Answer – because the grass is growing differently. And as with slopes, but for a different reason, the solution is to raise the cutting height a little.

Shaded grass struggles for light, becomes leggy and weak and thins out. Sometimes this calls for more remedial action than simply adjusting the cut height, but it will certainly help the plants to retain strength in what are difficult growing conditions.

WALKWAYS



Grass walkways are beautiful features in a garden – running between hedges or borders, or creating pathways between different areas. But they have their own problems, usually a mixture of concentrated footfall and tough competition from other plants.

Stick a narrow grass walkway between large shrubs or trees and you create a David-and-Goliath situation. And as in the biblical story, the diminutive grass will survive, being by nature such a tough plant. But it can still struggle – the bigger plants will suck moisture and nutrients from the soil, and that same soil will become compacted much quickly if the walkway is used regularly.

Once again, the solution is to raise the cutting height to minimise the stress on the plants. You should also use the grass box to prevent the clippings adding to the thatch layer.

So, in any awkward or problem area, the answer is to keep mowing but to adjust the height. Good mowing is good pruning, which will always help the grass plants. And it goes without saying that a sharp blade and clean cut are more important than ever when cutting more fragile parts of the lawn.

9. TIPS FROM THE PROS

Every skilled lawn professional will have a secret technique to getting the best cut, and of course they spend far more of their time than the average gardener perfecting their skill. But here are two tips that any generous lawn professional would be happy to share. They're easy to use and will improve the finished appearance, even if you're not after that Wembley look!

PERIMETER MOWING

The perimeter of your lawn is a hidden weak spot when mowing. Many people start by mowing the perimeter, which is fine, but then they finish off with another perimeter cut to tidy it up.

In addition, it is usually the zone where you turn the mower 180 degrees at the end of each line. This all adds up to double the wear and tear from the mower and will eventually lead to thinning.

So, only mow the perimeter once. Ideally do it at the end of your mowing, and vary the actual turning zone from one mowing to another if you can.



9. TIPS FROM THE PROS



STRAIGHT STRIPES

It is maddening to discover there's a wobbly line in your striping – and of course too late to do much about it until the next scheduled cut. However, there is a very simply method for keeping your stripes straight:

START by cutting the lawn in half down the middle with the first stripe. Mark out this first line by standing centrally behind the mower and carefully mowing towards a fixed point in the distance such as a shrub or tree.

NOW line up the mower to go over the same stripe BUT this time stand off-centre (left or right) so that your eyes are in line with the cut line. This makes it much easier to keep
the stripe straight, correcting any kinks as you go.

PROCEED in this manner for subsequent lines, alternating which side you stand as you turn at each end.

FINALLY mow the perimeter, but this time standing once again centrally behind the mower.

We hope you have found this guide useful.

However, mowing is only one part of good lawn care. It would such a shame if other lawn problems were to blight the results of your excellent mowing skills.

If you want to enjoy the many effective lawn care techniques that will ensure your lawn is both healthy and beautiful, why not take our online lawn care course? Visit our website for more information.

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