

# Borough of Tenafly Grass Cut It and Leave It Program

## A guide to Tenafly's Cut it and Leave It Program

Tenafly Department of  
Public Works utilizes this  
program by using recycling  
mowers.

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Grass clippings are a major part of New Jersey's municipal solid waste stream. Like other highly recyclable materials – such as newspapers, plastics, glass and aluminum, recycling grass clippings can help reduce the amount of waste going to landfills. As a New Jersey resident, you are already helping to reduce the amount of waste by recycling newspapers, plastics, cans and glass. But you can easily recycle the clippings you generate each time you mow your lawn – and save time and money while doing it.

### ARE GRASS CLIPPINGS REALLY THAT MUCH OF A DISPOSAL PROBLEM?

Yes. Disposing of grass clippings is very costly and wasteful. Grass clippings make up thousands of tons of New Jersey's solid waste. In fact, nearly a third of all summer waste handled by garbage haulers consists of grass clippings. They represent a waste management cost that you pay either directly to your trash hauler or indirectly in taxes. Each ton of grass clippings costs from \$65 to more than \$100 in disposal fees. Furthermore, lack of oxygen in landfills prevents grass clippings from decomposing quickly.

### WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

It's really simple. Just leave your clippings on the lawn when you mow. Grass clippings provide a natural and healthy fertilizer for a growing lawn.

### JUST CUT IT AND LEAVE IT TO SAVE TIME AND MONEY

What could be easier than cutting your lawn and not bagging clippings anymore? You'll save time because you won't have to stop to empty your lawnmower bag, and you'll avoid trips to the garbage can. In fact, studies show that homeowners who leave clippings on the lawn actually reduce their total mowing time by 20 to 25%. You'll also save money – no need to buy lawn trash bags. You can spend less on fertilizer as clippings provide nutrients such as nitrogen back into the soil.

### CORRECTLY MOWING YOUR LAWN

To maintain your lawn properly, avoid mowing more than the top third of the growing grass. Done consistently, this will result in an attractive, neatly trimmed lawn because the small clippings disappear when they filter down to the soil. New Jersey lawns thrive when mowed to about 2 to 3 inches, especially in summer. The taller grass will shade the soil, cool roots and prevent weeds, resulting in a healthier lawn.

### TRY MULCHING

Another option is purchasing a mulching mower or adding a mulching attachment to your present mower. These attachments chop clippings into fine pieces which slip easily into the soil. A study conducted by the University of Connecticut found that the nitrogen from grass clippings showed up in the growing grass within two weeks. Nitrogen is a nutrient that promotes thick green growth and a strong root system. By the end of the third year of the study, researchers estimated that about a third of the nitrogen found in grass came from previously recycled clippings. Annually, this added nearly two pounds of nitrogen to each thousand square feet of lawn.

### WHAT ABOUT THATCH?

Don't worry about clippings contributing to thatch problems. Lawn experts agree that lawn clippings do not create thatch in the lawn. Rather, thatch is formed from the accumulation of dead grass roots and stems. The more you fertilize and water your lawn, the faster it grows and the faster thatch accumulates.



### **IT'S ALL HOW YOU FERTILIZE AND WATER**

Fertilizer requirements of New Jersey grasses vary, depending on turf type, soil chemistry and many other factors. The only way to determine specific lawn growing needs is to have soil tested through the local Rutgers Cooperative Extension Office. If testing is not done, the following may be used as a general guide:

Most lawns in New Jersey need both nitrogen and potassium, major nutrients that lead to thick, green growth and strong roots. By law, fertilizer labels must show the "N-P-K" ratio – the amount of nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium in the product. An N-P-K ratio of 4:1:2 suits most New Jersey lawns. It may be 20-5-10 or 16-4-8 or any other mathematical combination, as long as it contains about 4 times as much nitrogen as phosphorous, and about two times as much nitrogen as potassium.

When you recycle clippings, you return nearly two pounds of nitrogen to every thousand square feet of lawn each year. You may also need to add another 1.5 pounds of nitrogen each year. Each time you fertilize, apply half a pound of nitrogen to every 1000 square feet of lawn.

Normally, good lawn maintenance requires only three fertilizations annually: mid to late May; mid September; Late November to early December. If your lawn is heavily shaded, fertilize no more than twice: once in mid May and once in September.

Most sunny lawns require three applications of fertilizer each year. By fertilizing in late fall it will keep your lawn greener over the winter and will help it become green in early spring without the excessive growth induced by spring fertilization.

The more you water, the faster the lawn will grow. Controlling watering time and rates will help the lawn grow at manageable levels and still stay healthy.

### **WHAT KIND OF GRASS TYPES ARE THERE?**

In New Jersey, cool season grasses such as bluegrass, perennial rye grass and fine and tall turf-type fescues are best for attractive, long-lasting lawns. Improved perennial rye grass is suitable for full sun/partial shade; bluegrass is best in sun; fescues are good for full shade. Bluegrass and perennial rye grass require the most care. A mix of several species and varieties is recommended to increase hardiness, attractive appearance and resistance to disease and drought.

### **WHAT TO DO ABOUT EXCESSIVE GROWTH**

If excessive growth occurs between mowings, you can double mow. Adjust the mower height up to remove only the top third of the grass blade. One or two days later, set the mower to the regular height and mow again to get back on track. You may prefer to collect grass clippings and apply to flower or vegetable gardens as mulch. Place about an inch of clippings directly on the soil around plantings to moderate soil temperature and reduce weed growth, soil splattering, erosion, compaction, evaporation and runoff.

### **INCORPORATE CLIPPINGS INTO THE SOIL**

Another method of recycling grass clippings is to mix them directly into garden soil. Since most New Jersey soils are low in organic materials, it is recommended that fresh or composted grass clippings which contain valuable organic matter be added to the soil. This will increase drainage in heavier soils, while improving water retention in sandier soils. It also serves to reduce erosion and harmful effects of extremes in pH levels and over-fertilization.

### **CONSIDER BACK YARD COMPOSTING**

Many gardeners find that a limited amount of grass clippings are an excellent addition to the backyard compost pile. However, unless clippings are mixed with other organic materials, they can produce an unpleasant odor when you dig into the compost pile.

One way to reduce odors is to add composted leaves to help aerate nitrogen-rich grass clippings. Add no more than one-third grass clippings to your compost pile or it will become oxygen-starved.

Should your compost pile begin to emit odors, turn the materials with a pitchfork and add pulverized lime. The turning process adds oxygen and the addition of lime neutralizes odors.

### **ALTERNATIVES TO GROWING TURF GRASS**

In some areas, you may want to consider an alternative to growing turf grass. Increasing the size of shrub beds and growing ground covers can help reduce maintenance and yard waste. Ground covers such as Pachysandra, English Ivy and Periwinkle can be grown successfully in filtered light and in shaded areas.

