

I get a lot of calls this time of the year about poorly growing lawns. Many times when I take a look at the situation it appears that improper mowing may be the issue. Most of us don't think about mowing until the weekend comes up. Then it's cut it and get done with it. But mowing has a measurable effect on the way grass grows.

How often should a lawn be cut? The rate of growth and the height of the cut should determine the time for cutting. In general you should mow before the grass becomes one and a half times as tall as the cutting height of your mower. Basically don't remove more than one-third of the grass top at any one cutting. Mowing height depends on the variety of grass that is in your lawn. For St. Augustine lawns we should allow a height of 2 to 3 inches, Centipede is 1 to 2 inches, common Bermuda 1 ¼ to 1 ½, and hybrid Bermuda ¾ to 1 inch. You can actually have a better quality lawn at the lower heights, but you will need to mow more often and apply a little more nitrogen fertilizer to the lawn during the growing season.

Another important aspect of keeping your lawn healthy is the type of mower that you use. Most people mow with rotary mowers. A rotary mower becomes very dull after a few uses and should be kept sharp. Using dull blades tend to fray the leaf blades instead of leaving a smooth even cut. A reel mower is more difficult to sharpen, but requires less frequent sharpening. A reel mower is more expensive, but is more rugged and uses less fuel. Bermuda grass responds extremely well to reel mowers as compared to rotary. Just remember when using a reel mower a smooth turf, free of sticks, stones, and other debris is necessary.

Removal of clipping is not necessary if you mow as recommended. Research has shown that moderate amounts of small clipping decompose rapidly in warm weather with good moisture. Nutrients in the clippings are recycled without contributing greatly to the thatch layer. Clippings should be removed if they form clumps on the surface. Clumping normally occurs only if the grass is allowed to grow too high before mowing or if mowed wet. Centipede clippings do not decay as readily as other grasses, so clippings need to be collected and properly disposed of when growth is rapid.

Another issue in our lawns that I see is lack of watering or improper watering. Usually 1 or 2 inches of water are needed on lawns each week during times of drought to keep the grass actively growing. During dry periods water lawn only once or twice a week with at least 1 inch of water. Light frequent watering only wet the surface of the soil and may result in shallow roots and a weak grass. The best time to water is in the morning. It is safest from a disease standpoint, not to keep a grass wet all night long.

Hopefully with this information about mowing and watering you will be able to maintain a prettier, healthy lawns throughout most of the growing season.