

Every year in New Jersey, dozens of people poison themselves taking care of their own lawns because they don't take product label warnings seriously, and they think more is better. Lawn additives are powerful chemicals, and you need to use them correctly.

### Fertilizer

Too much fertilizer means rapid growth and more mowing. Use soil testing to verify the need for fertilizer. Contact the Union County Extension Office for a soil test kit. Fertilize in September and again in October or November for a healthier lawn. This keeps the lawn greener through the winter and strengthens roots for thick growth in the spring without the unwanted long growth caused by spring fertilization. This means fewer mowings, less clippings and less work. Don't fertilize in summer unless needed; too much can kill cool-season grasses such as fine fescues. Use fertilizer containing at least 50% controlled release nitrogen. The bag may say "water insoluble", "organic", or "slow release" nitrogen.

When you cut it and leave it, the nitrogen from the grass clippings will add one to two pounds of nitrogen a year to each thousand square feet of lawn.



### HERBICIDES AND INSECTICIDES

Herbicides remain on the grass for some time, and some make grass clippings unsuitable for mulch, so it's important to cut it and leave it when you use weed killers. Too much herbicide can burn the lawn, kill nearby plants, and contaminate waterways. Instead of using repeated whole lawn application of weed killers, try a one-time pre-emergent weed killer and spot application if your lawn has only a few weeds. If you see signs of insect damage, determine what the specific insect problem is before you select an insecticide. You may find that you can correct the problem without using an insecticide.

You can have the lawn you want and still be environmentally responsible. Practice careful turf management and...

### CUT IT AND LEAVE IT!



*Prepared by Cranford's Green Team.  
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NJ Dept. of Environmental Protection  
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### GRASS: CUT IT AND LEAVE IT

**How to practice  
environmentally friendly  
lawn care.**

**You can still have a beautiful  
lawn!**

**Prepared by  
Cranford's Green Team  
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Grass clippings are a major part of New Jersey's municipal solid waste stream. As a New Jersey resident, you are already helping to reduce air pollution and wasted resources by recycling. You can do more by reducing waste at the source. Leave grass clippings on your lawn when you mow and let nature do the recycling.

### **CUT IT AND LEAVE IT**

#### **TO SAVE TIME AND MONEY!**

You'll save 20-25% of your time because you won't have to stop and empty your lawnmower bag, and you'll avoid purchasing yard waste bags. You'll need to fertilize less (25-50%), since clippings return nutrients to the soil.

#### **MOW YOUR LAWN CORRECTLY!**

To maintain your lawn properly, mow high and mow often, so that you only take off about 1/3 of the length of the grass. This will result in an attractive, neatly trimmed lawn, and clippings will disappear when they filter down to the soil. Most New Jersey lawns should be mowed 2½-3½" high, especially in summer, to shade the soil, cool the roots and block weed growth. Mulching mowers help you do this; they chop the clippings into fine pieces that slip easily down to the soil. Most new mowers are mulching mowers, and you can attach mulching equipment to your existing mower.

### **THE RIGHT AMOUNT OF WATER**

Controlling watering rates will help your lawn grow at manageable levels and still stay healthy. Don't water until the lawn is dry. If it turns blue-green or gray, or if footprints don't spring back, it's time to water. Provide about an inch at a time for clay soil, and half an inch for sandy soil. Place a few empty cans around the lawn and note how long it takes for that much water to collect. Even in dry periods, lawns usually need a thorough watering only once a week, or twice if the soil is sandy. If managed carefully, water will soak the soil four to six inches down, just right for building healthy root systems and greener growth. Early morning watering conserves water by preventing evaporation. The worst time of the day to water your lawn is the middle to late afternoon, when the sun is strongest.



#### **What to do with excessive growth**

If you miss a week mowing, or if a heavy rain causes fast growth, you have some choices:

*Double mow:* set the mower higher than usual and cut no more than the top third of the grass. In a day or two, set the mower height down and bring the lawn down another third of its height. Continue until you reach the desired height.

*Mulch heavy clippings into the garden:* bag or rake the clippings and apply them to your garden as mulch. Spread them an inch deep, to cool the soil, retain water, prevent erosion and compaction, and smother weed seeds.

*Mix clippings with the soil:* Soil can be improved by adding organic matter. Added organic materials make heavy clay soils become more productive, and sandy soils retain more moisture.

*Compost:* Grass speeds up your composting, but can cause odors and deplete oxygen if not properly managed. If you compost large amounts of grass, turn over frequently.

### **WHAT ABOUT THATCH?**

Grass clippings don't cause thatch.

Thatch is formed from the accumulation of dead roots and stems. The more you fertilize and water your lawn, the more it grows and the faster thatch accumulates.

### **LAWN ADDITIVES**

Many people apply too many lawn products, too often. It costs money and may harm the lawn. Check with the Union County Extension program for expert advice on lawn care and disease treatment.