Leave it on the Lawn

A guide to healthy lawns and healthy lakes

The Basics:
Keep grass clippings off the street and other paved areas

- Mowing into the street is a violation of City of Albert Lea ordinances
- Grass clippings on paved surfaces are likely to end up in storm drains, bringing clippings and other dirt/debris into our lakes, streams, and wetlands
- Grass clippings contain phosphorus, the nutrient that turns lakes green with algae
- Sweep up grass clippings and either compost them or return to your lawn

The Benefits:
- Good for the environment—reduces the amount of fertilizer used and pollutants entering the system
- Saves money on fertilizer—grass clippings return nutrients to the soil
- Saves time—no need to bag grass!
- Reduces the amount of trash in your garbage and in landfills

Tips:
- Allow grass to grow to 3” and cut no more than 1” off the top (the “one-third rule”)
- In summer, raise your mower blade 1/2”. This will help your grass tolerate stress, grow a stronger root system, and the shade of longer grass may provide some weed control
- If you have a mulching mower or attachment, clippings can be mulched to reduce break-down time
- Yearly nitrogen applications may be reduced by 1/3 to 1/2 when grass clippings are returned to the lawn
Grass clippings can provide up to 30% of your fertilizer requirements!
Grass clippings are 85% water and 5% nitrogen. When they dry out they return water and nutrients to the soil and leave behind very little biomass.
One bushel of fresh grass clippings can contain 0.1 pounds of phosphorus—enough to produce 30 to 50 pounds of algae growth if it ends up in a lake or river.

FAQs:

Q: Will grass clippings cause thatch?
A: Nope! Thatch is the accumulation of the woody parts of grass (stems and roots), not the clippings.

Q: Will grass clippings cut off air supply to my grass?
A: Only if you improperly handle them. If you wait too long in between mows and have very long, thick clippings, or if they stick together due to wetness, it may become a problem.

Q: What if my clippings are too long?
A: You can mow over the clippings to further shred and scatter, or you can raise your mower blade and gradually lower the height over the course of a few mowings.

Q: Do I need a mulching mower?
A: Nope! Any mower can recycle grass clippings, simply remove the bagging attachment.

Q: What if I see signs of lawn disease?
A: In this case, bagging and composting/disposing of clippings separately is the best option to avoid spreading the problem.

Other Alternatives:
If you are unable to leave clippings on the lawn, use one of the following methods to keep grass out of Albert Lea storm sewers:

Mulch: Use as mulch around garden plants or between rows of flowers or vegetables. Mulch reduces weeds and conserves moisture. Avoid mulching too thickly or it may block oxygen from the soil or become odorous.

Backyard compost: Add clippings to your compost pile; they’re an excellent source of nitrogen. When composting grass, it’s advisable to mix with other yard wastes such as leaves or woodchips to increase air space and aid in decomposition.

For more information on starting a compost pile, visit the University of MN Extension website, www.extension.umn.edu, or their publication, “Composting and Mulching: A Guide to Managing Organic Yard Wastes”.

Transfer Station: The City of Albert Lea Transfer Station accepts yard waste for $10/yr or a truckload of brush for $5. For details check the city’s website at cityofalbertlea.org, or call 507-373-5013.

For more information:
City of Albert Lea: www.cityofalbertlea.org
MN Department of Natural Resources: www.dnr.state.mn.us
MN Board of Water and Soil Resources: www.bwsr.state.mn.us

www.shellrock.org
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