



Grasscycling Guide



GrassCycling is the natural recycling of grass by leaving grass clippings on the lawn when mowing. Once on the ground the clippings, which contain 80-85% water, decompose quickly returning valuable nutrients like nitrogen back into the soil.

GrassCycling should be used as one piece of an integral lawn management system which includes thatching, aerating, cutting, watering and fertilising. Leaving cuttings on your lawn all season long provides the same level of nutrients as one fertiliser application per year. GrassCycling is simple, easy and it works!

How does grasscycling work?

Regardless of the size of lawn you have, GrassCycling leads to a healthier and lower maintenance lawn. There are a number of key steps involved in GrassCycling:

Reduce thatch or matting: Rake up all the thatch (roots, dead leaves and root stalks) from your lawn in spring before new grass shoots appear. Thatch keeps clippings from reaching the soil and decomposing properly.

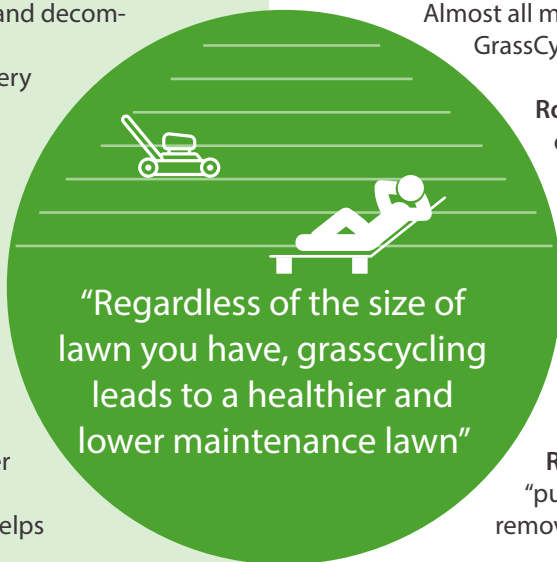
You can also aerate your lawn every couple of years but make sure to rake compost into the plugs afterwards.

This will improve drainage, relieve compaction and provide a good germinating environment for the grass seed applied next.

Grow longer grass: Let your grass grow 3"-5" in height. Longer grass encourages a deeper root system, shades out weeds, and helps your lawn retain moisture.

Cut less grass at a time: This is the key to GrassCycling - cut only one third of the height of your grass each time you cut it. Grass can be damaged if too much of each grass blade is removed at once. Lawns kept at the proper height are also easier to cut.

Leave cuttings on your lawn: Fertilise your lawn by leaving the grass cuttings behind!



Equipment needed for grasscycling

GrassCycling does not require the purchase of a special "mulching" or "recycling" lawn mower, although these do work better, especially in wet conditions or with tall grass. The most important thing is to keep the blades of your mower sharp – you should do this at the start of spring each year.

Almost all mowers can be used or adapted to GrassCycle, the main types:

Rotary mowers remove the grass catching bag and cover the outlet spot (outlet covers are available from most manufacturers).

Special mulching blades designed to chop cuttings into tiny pieces and blow them into the lawn can be retrofitted to many mowers.

Reel-type mowers, including manual "push" mowers, can be used by simply removing the catcher.

When it's time to replace your mower, consider buying a mulching, recycling or non-polluting reel-type push mower. All of these do a good job of shredding and scattering grass cuttings. If you need a power mower, quiet electric ones are now on the market and are cost competitive with louder petrol versions.



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What Are the Best Mowing Practices for GrassCycling?

Effective GrassCycling depends on the rapid decomposition of the cuttings. This avoids grass clumps that could damage the lawn or be brought into the house. The key to getting grass clippings to decompose quickly is to cut them into small pieces and spread them evenly over the lawn. Here are some tips for success:

- Remove heavy leaf cover or other debris from the lawn before mowing.
- Mow with a sharp blade - this cuts grass cleaner and disperses cuttings better. Dull blades tear grass instead of cutting it which is bad for the grass.
- Mow regularly, cutting no more than one-third of the total grass height each time you cut the grass:
- Mowing your lawn too short weakens turf, making it more susceptible to weeds, pest damage, disease or injury, and discourages deep rooting. o Raise the mowing height of the lawn mower during spring and summer. The higher mowing height encourages root growth.
- During periods of rapid growth, mowing every 5-7 days might be needed. If the grass grows too high between mowings, the long cuttings may not penetrate into the lawn to break down and will sit on top suffocating the lawn.

It's best to mow your lawn when it is dry so cuttings can filter down onto the soil without clumping. This can be difficult in rainy Ireland but if you must mow in rainy weather, try to spread the cuttings evenly over the lawn. Let them dry out for a day or two and then mow again to break up clumps and push the cuttings into the lawn. And of course you can collect cuttings for composting when grass is too wet, too tall or growing too fast for GrassCycling.

Remember that mowing frequency will vary with the temperature, soil fertility, the amount of moisture in the soil, the season and the natural growth rate of the variety of grass you are using.

Clean the underside of the mower after each cutting - wet grass can become matted on the underside of the mower deck resulting in clumping of clippings or mechanical failures from clogging. Dried on cuttings are more difficult to remove than fresh ones.

Mow at the proper height for the season and the type of grass you have. For cool season grasses, the most common grasses in Ireland, set your mower at 2½" to 3½". For warm season grasses, use a setting of 1½" to 2½".

What Are the Best Watering Practices for GrassCycling?

While watering your lawn may seem like a crazy thing in Ireland, there are dry periods when this is necessary. Water is valuable and reduced water use has become more important. Grasscycling minimises the need for additional watering and also prepares lawns for rare dry periods.



"Good watering produces healthy turf growth that is easier to GrassCycle"

For lawns to remain green and actively growing during dry summer periods, about one inch of water is needed per week from irrigation or rainfall. Good watering produces healthy turf growth that is easier to GrassCycle. So:

Don't over water - water only when needed; the more you water your lawn, the faster it's going to grow and the more you will have to mow it.

Water early in the morning - this allows more water to penetrate into the soil rather than evaporate in the middle of a warm or hot day.

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What Are the Best Fertiliser Practices for GrassCycling?

Proper use of fertiliser is important for a healthy lawn and reducing the need to mow. Most grasses require only low levels of nitrogen for good colour and controlled growth. When it comes to fertiliser, more is not necessarily better - over fertilisation weakens lawns and stimulates excessive growth which requires more frequent mowing. Here are some tips for fertilising:

- Get your soil tested before you start to fertilise – this will help you determine if and what type of fertiliser you need.
- Determine the amount of fertiliser needed. It is best to follow the directions on the label. The quantity of fertiliser needed and the time of year to apply it depend on the type of grass grown.
- Fertilise cool-season grasses (most common in Ireland) in autumn and winter to encourage deep rooting and storage of nutrients to help the grass thrive during the warmer growing season.
- Fertilise warm-season grasses (e.g. Zoysia and Bermuda) during the spring and summer.
- Always fertilise when the grass is dry. This prevents the grass from being burned and allow the fertiliser to fall through the grass and land on top of the soil where it can be watered in.
- If turf growth is too fast for your mowing frequency, you may need to reduce the amount of fertiliser applied.
- Fertilise with slow release nitrogen sources such as sulphur-coated urea, urea formaldehyde or any other form of organic fertiliser for moderate and even growth. Avoid high quantities of fast-acting fertilisers such as ammonium nitrate, ammonium sulphate or straight urea.
- Over time, reduce the amount of fertiliser used or frequency of fertilisation to complement the nutrients provided by GrassCycling. Begin with a 10% reduction of fertiliser working up to 30% reduction over a few seasons. The ultimate balance will depend on the type of grass grown and the fertility and health of your soil.



So, why GrassCycle?

Save money: GrassCycling replaces up to a third of your fertiliser needs. It also saves space in your bins. As Ireland goes towards a pay-by-weight system for waste this will make a difference to your bills. If you bring your garden waste to Civic Amenity Sites, GrassCycling will help reduce the number loads you bring each time.

Save Time: Even though you might mow more often, you spend less time raking, sweeping, bagging, and hauling cuttings to be collected, or less time gathering materials up and composting them at home yourself. GrassCycling has been shown to reduce time spent on maintaining your lawn by up to 30-40%.

Enjoy a healthier lawn: The valuable nutrients released through GrassCycling make lawns greener and encourage healthier grass. Grass cutting decomposition enhances soil microbial activity and adds beneficial organic matter to the soil, making it softer and the lawn more drought resistant.

Help the Environment: Since grass cuttings make up the majority of landscape or garden trimming collected and managed in landfills, this simple change in lawn management can significantly reduce the amount of materials going to the dump. This helps to conserve energy, reduce greenhouse gases and minimise the negative impacts associated with landfilling these valuable materials.