



Talbot Ecological Land Care

Certified Consulting Arborists, Horticulturists and Conservation Designers
Ecological Landscape Design and Tree, Shrub and Lawn Care Services
Consultation, Education, Permitting, Installation and Management

PROPER LAWN AND PLANT CARE TIPS FOR ECOLOGICAL PROGRAMS

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A program of ecological lawn and landscape care succeeds best when you use the best maintenance practices available—including a well-designed natural fertility, soil mineral and pH management program.

Proper mowing is the most important cultural practice for ecological lawn care. Many lawns can be significantly improved just by instituting the following mowing practices (based on university research):

- The first and last mowing of the season should be at a height of about two-and-one-half inches to help prevent winter fungus problems and to remove damaged tips.

- *For the rest of the year mow at a three inch minimum cutting height--3.5 inches is even better!* This encourages more photosynthesis, deeper rooting *and significantly less crabgrass and other weeds.* Remember: it is an evenly cut lawn that makes it attractive, not the actual height; so mow high. (You may mow sunny, *irrigated lawns only* at 2.5 inches during hot summer months to minimize water transpiration.)

- *Mow lightly and mow often.* Be sure you or your contractor is mowing often enough to remove no more than one-third of the leaf blade at any one time (another advantage of mowing at 3 inches or more—you can remove 1.5 inches of leaf blade with no damaging effect). Mowing too low stresses lawn grasses and weakens them—leading to poor turf and more weeds. Don't scalp lawns with weed-whackers either.

- *Keep your mower blades sharp.* Dull blades tear grass plants, leaving them damaged and vulnerable to disease infestation. Sharpen after each 4-6 hours of use or professionally sharpen them after 10 hours.

- *Leave your lawn clippings on the lawn.* Research clearly demonstrates that lawns where clippings remain to recycle are far superior to lawns where clippings are removed in all 25 categories of lawn health and beauty. A year's worth of clippings is equal to about one application of fertilizer and much more.

Along with mowing and fertility, **watering** is the cultural practice that most affects plant health. Generally, we do not need to irrigate lawns in the northeast. Cool season grasses, fertilized and growing well during the spring and fall, simply go dormant during hot, dry periods to protect themselves naturally.

- If you do water your turf, irrigate one or two times a week—depending on the type of soil you have—in the early morning so that no water runs off the lawn. Water until it penetrates the root zone of the lawn only (about 4-6 inches). Sunny lawn areas and southern slopes may need water more often. Lawns can be seriously damaged by overwatering (i.e., daily watering), especially in shade or with poor drainage.

- Research has shown that daily sprinkling of lawns *in the middle of hot, summer days only* (i.e., 1/10th inch of water at noon) helps reduce stress, thatch and pest imbalances by stimulating biological activity in the thatch layer during hot dry periods. Check with us to see if this would be valuable for your lawn.

- **Trees and shrubs must be watered slowly to a depth of 12 to 18 inches**, but only once every 5 to 10 days in dry weather (depending on soils and site). *With more drought years this is more critical than ever.* Lawn sprinklers water trees and shrubs poorly—if they irrigate your plants set the timer for every 5 days for an hour or more. Better yet, set up separate zones for plant beds using drip irrigation or soaker hoses.

Prevent lawn and plant stress: any maintenance practices or landscape use that weakens a lawn, tree or other plant can lead to decline, pest damage or even early death. Improper pruning of trees and shrubs (including excessive shearing), too much or too little water applied to plants, overuse of soluble nitrogen fertilizers, pesticides and mulch, and bark damage from mowers, weed whackers, mulch, etc. are common causes of plant stress. Do not leave any solid objects or fallen leaves on the lawn for long. Heavy lawn use, traffic, construction damage or pathways can compact soils, weaken turf and damage tree and shrub roots. *Have us design pathways or direct traffic or construction to protect plants.* Do not walk on wet or frozen turf. Move heavy play or activity to different parts of the lawn regularly to allow time for recovery.