

Mowing the Lawn Properly

If you have a favorite play in football history, chances are it's a deep pass and a diving catch or a running back bursting through holes and shedding tacklers en route to a romp to the end zone.

But none of that would have happened without the offensive linemen making the key blocks that set up the plays that will live in highlight reels forever.

When it comes to lawn and garden tasks, lawn mowing might seem to be the least glamorous among them.

It's simple and mindless, right? You just go back and forth, over and over, right?

Okay, we're not going to claim that mowing the lawn is the hardest part of maintaining a healthy lawn, and it's certainly a lot easier than fending off a 300-pound gladiator who wants to mow *you* down, but in its own way, lawn mowing is the offensive lineman of lawn care because it all at once sets the stage for great things and keeps them going once they start.

Cutting your grass at the right times and to the right lengths doesn't just make your lawn look pretty; it helps the long-term health of your lawn by helping protect it from heat, drought, insect pests, and weeds.

Cool-season Grasses

When, how often, and to what height you should cut your grass depends on both time of year and grass type. What grows best here in western Iowa is not what grows best along the Gulf Plain of Texas or in coastal California or even in Washington state, which is farther north than we are but wetter and milder overall.

Despite the hot summers we get here, it probably won't surprise you that the grasses that do best here are cool-season ones such as Kentucky bluegrass, perennial ryegrass, and fine and tall fescue. These grasses grow really well in the spring and fall, which happen to be our best growing times in the Sioux City region.

It's really important, especially here where we are ready to advise and serve, to plant grass that fits your climate.

Warm-season grasses such as zoysia and Bermuda can easily invade your lawn and should never be planted around here. In the summer, when our climate-appropriate grasses slow down, these grasses grow lush and green, but they're fooling you. They cannot take our winters, and if they dominate your lawn, you will end up with dead patches, maybe a lot of them!

Proper Length of Your Grass

It's tempting, especially when the kids are driving you crazy and making you question your life choices, to fire up that mower and get rolling.

We admit that could be fun and therapeutic, but we also ask you to reconsider. As easy as it is to push or drive a mower, it's also a little more complicated than just going out and doing it.

"I like to cut my grass really short, like a golf course or a football field. When I do that, I don't have to mow the lawn as much. Mowing the lawn is such a waste of my time."

Okay, that makes it more likely that the grass you're working so hard to keep is now more exposed to the withering summer heat. And to insect pests double-teaming your grass by eating the visible blades and the buried roots. And then to weeds that excel at moving in and taking over the places where grass weakens and dies. Taller grass also promotes stronger root systems.

"Mow the lawn every week? Whatever. I have better things to do. I'll just let it grow and then mow it when it gets too high."

Maybe that will work, but we doubt it. When the grass gets too high, it gets hard to cut. That could require multiple mowings that you really don't want to do. If you try to do it all at once, you run the chance of jamming the blade up and overworking the motor. Then you might need costly repairs or a new mower (not cheap). You'll also welcome mosquitoes and other unwanted guests that love your too-tall grass.

So How High Should It Be?

As with many other things, there is a sweet spot when it comes to your type of grass and its ideal length.

Your cool-season grass should stay around 3.5 inches during the spring and fall and 4-4.5 inches through the summer. The longer length in the summer helps protect from the heat.

That sounds like a small difference, and it is, but small differences matter in big ways when it comes to lawns. When a lawn is kept at the correct height, it is not only nicer to look at but also is more resistant to drought, disease, insect pests, and weeds. The roots are deeper and stronger, the soil gets needed shade, and the grass and soil retain water better.

Mowing the Lawn on Your Own

To be honest, we understand why cutting the grass on your own can be appealing. For some, it's just the pleasure of being outside. For others, it might be a temporary escape from other responsibilities or just some much-needed "me time."

If you're going to do the cutting on your own, there are some tips to follow:

- Only mow the lawn when it is dry. It is very difficult to cut wet grass, and it might even cause damage to the blades.
- Mowing during cooler parts of the day, such as early morning, late afternoon, and early evening, is easier on both your mower and you. Just don't mow *too* early in the morning and have all the neighbors ready to get out the pitchforks!
- Keep the blade sharp for best performance and to reduce the workload on the engine. If your blade is dull, you may have to go over sections more than once, putting more stress on the engine and burning up more fuel.
- Don't always mow in the same pattern or direction. This will help prevent compacted soil, ruts, and other unwanted signs of wear.
- If your yard is on a slope, mow side-to-side as much as possible, not uphill-downhill. Uphill mowing is very demanding on the engine.
- If your grass does get much too long, such as while you are away on vacation or when there are successive rainy weekends keeping you from mowing, don't cut it down all at once. Instead, set the blade higher and do two or three runs with a few days between each one.
- Change the mower's oil at least once per season. Always start with fresh gasoline each season unless you used a fuel stabilizer at the end of the previous one; using old gas can create problems.
- Remove debris such as sticks and large rocks before mowing, and don't push or drive a running mower over pavement. Running over large debris in the lawn can damage the blade. On pavement, there is no protection from objects being hurled about, possibly causing injuries to people and damage to property.
- Keep children and pets away from running mowers. It is recommended that children under 12 years old not operate mowers.

Saving Time, Energy, and Sweat

Although many people do prefer to mow their lawns on their own, there are many others who do not. To some people, having to spend a few hours on the weekend mowing the lawn after a long week at work is almost as appealing as working an extra day. There are also people with grass and pollen allergies for whom mowing a lawn can be an extremely unpleasant task. For people with heart conditions, mowing a lawn can be dangerous. And there are all kinds of other reasons people would rather not mow their lawns themselves.

At Sharp Lawn Care, mowing is just one of the many services we provide to beautify and protect your lawn and your property. Let us be the ones to deal with the heat while you do things you'd

rather do. Let us worry about the equipment, proper grass height, clearing debris, etc. Contact us for a [free quote](#) today!

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