

# Mowing Done Right

Every lawn needs mowing if it's going to look great and be healthy. Mowing is one of the simplest lawn-related tasks a homeowner can perform, but there's actually more to it than just firing up the mower and pushing it all over the lawn.

Among the considerations are how often to mow the lawn, how much to cut, what directions and patterns to use, and what to do with the clippings. There are also tasks such as edging and trimming that you have to do in order to properly maintain your grass. Finally, there are safety and performance precautions to know, and decisions about what equipment to use.

Given all of that, there are definitely right and wrong ways to mow the lawn. In this article, we're going to talk about how to do it right. If you like to do things yourself, you'll walk away from this with the knowledge you need to mow your lawn safely and effectively.

## Mowing

This is the big job, and although it seems like such an easy thing to do, you can actually cause harm to the lawn, your equipment, or yourself if you don't do it right.

### Types of Mowers

First, you need to decide what kind of mower you need. Mowers come in two basic varieties: push mowers and ride-on-top mowers.

Among push mowers, there are all kinds of choices. The least expensive is the old-fashioned push mower that has no engine, but the work can be slow and difficult with them. They only make sense for very small yards like those for townhomes.

Almost all homeowners using push mowers on lawns of single-family homes are going to go with a mower that has an engine, but there are still a lot of choices. A self-propelled mower makes the work easier, especially if there is sloping terrain, but it is going to be more expensive than a mower that isn't self-propelled.

For homeowners who prefer to avoid using gas mowers, there are electric- and battery-powered mowers. These ensure an emissions-free mowing experience, and they are easy to maintain, but they have their drawbacks, too.

For one thing, these mowers tend to be much less powerful than their gas-powered counterparts, making things more difficult when grass is high and when the lawn isn't flat. Mowers powered by rechargeable batteries can lose their charge before the job is done on larger lawns, and customers sometimes experience durability issues with the batteries.

Plug-in mowers offer relief from recharging or refilling, but then one has to manage long extension cords. Quite often, accidental unplugging causes frustration. It is also easy to carelessly run over the cord and cut it.

Ride-on-top mowers are the most expensive types, but they offer some obvious benefits. On large properties, they greatly reduce the time required to complete the task. They also provide benefits on hilly or sloped ground. And while some people stereotype users of these mowers as lazy, ride-on-top mowers simply save time and might be the only options for people with disabilities or health concerns (like someone who has experienced heart troubles).

### **Mowing Properly**

Once you're ready to mow, you have to know how to do it, how frequently to do it, and how much grass to cut at a time.

If you always mow in the same pattern or direction, you risk creating ruts or damaging the soil you repeatedly run the wheels over. Keep that in mind, and also always go through the yard beforehand to remove debris such as rocks and sticks that can interfere with cutting or damage the blade. When at all possible, don't mow uphill, as this stresses the engine more.

For our climate, we recommend mowing once a week during the growing season, though sometimes you can get by with mowing every other week if there is a drought or other conditions resulting in slow growth. Don't mow when the lawn is wet, and mow early or late in the day to reduce fatigue for both you and the mower.

In this region, we have cool-weather grasses, and our recommendation is to maintain a grass height of 3.5 inches in the spring and fall, and 4-4.5 inches in the summer. *Why does this matter?* Grass that is too short is more susceptible to heat, drought, and weeds; grass that is too tall can attract lawn-damaging pests and also can be difficult to cut.

What to do with the grass clippings can depend. If you are cutting the lawn the proper length and at the right intervals, you can often leave the clippings on the lawn as fertilizer. But if the clippings are going to be too high, you're going to need to use a bag attachment that you will have to empty regularly, or you will have to rake/blow/bag afterward.

Other performance and safety tips include keeping the blade sharp, changing the oil each season, using fresh gasoline, cutting too-tall grass over multiple settings instead of all at once, not running a mower over pavement where it can propel debris, and keeping young children away from running mowers.

Should you have questions about determining any of these things, don't be afraid to consult with a specialist.

## **Edging and Trimming**

You surely have noticed that there are spots that your mower just doesn't handle very well. For those, we have edging and trimming.

Edging is needed wherever grass meets a hard surface such as concrete or asphalt (patios, sidewalks, and driveways, for instance). When you run a mower along an edge, you often end up with a strip of grass that got cut little or not at all. This might cause you to perform some interesting maneuvers that may not even work and might be risky. On very small lawns, people might use clippers, but this becomes too much of a task on larger properties. Instead, it's best to use an edger, which often looks a lot like a miniature lawn mower with the blade set vertically, not horizontally. Like mowers, edgers can be gas-powered, cordless (battery-powered), or electric (plug-in cords), with similar benefits and drawbacks.

Trimming is for places where grass meets vertical obstacles a mower can't go over. Examples of vertical obstacles are trees, fences, poles, fire hydrants, and the house itself. For edging, you need a specialized handheld device. Like edgers, trimmers can be gas-powered, cordless, or electric. Since they require the use of both hands, using them can get tiring if there is a lot of edging to do. A way you can alleviate this is to split duties-- one person mows and another does the edging and trimming. Another is to do the tasks on separate days, weather permitting.

## **Blowing**

Finally, there is blowing. Mowing, edging, and trimming are going to leave clippings behind on places like driveways, patios, and sidewalks. This is not harmful, but it's unattractive, and chances are you'll want to buy a blower so you can remove the clippings the easy way. Just make sure not to create big piles on the lawn that will kill the grass beneath them!

## **Let the Pros Save You Time, Money, and Hassle**

Mowing a lawn by yourself isn't hard, but it's a lot of hard work. When you factor in the costs for mowers, edgers, trimmers, blowers, and other equipment, it can also get pretty expensive. There can also be health considerations that make mowing unpleasant or even risky for some people. Finally, you may just want to do other things with your time!

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