

## Clippings Disposal Getting Tougher

Because grass clippings take up valuable space in landfills, many states are passing legislation banning disposal of landscape material in these areas.

This issue is not only creating problems for homeowners and commercial property owners, but also for golf course superintendents, LCOs, landscape contractors and others who maintain properties and handle the organic waste and debris.

New Jersey was the first to adopt a statewide ban on curbside disposal of grass clippings and yard waste. Other states that have approved bans are Connecticut, Iowa, Ohio, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Florida, Illinois, Minnesota, Washington, D. C. and Wisconsin. Dozens of other communities are also banning curbside disposal of grass clippings, leaves and other yard waste.

Cities such as Madison, Wis., will not pick up bags of grass clippings or other yard waste. Instead, homeowners are encouraged to leave grass clippings where they fall.

According to the Professional Lawn Care Association of America, at least 10 states have less than five years of landfill capacity; 14 others have less than 10 years useable space. It is estimated that 20 percent of all municipal landfill space is taken up by landscape waste such as leaves, grass clippings and tree and shrub debris. By some estimates, half of our country's approximately 6,000 landfills will close by the turn of the century.

### Alternatives to collecting clippings

Alternatives to dumping grass clippings in landfills include "Grasscycling"—a program recently begun by PLCAA to

encourage homeowners to leave clippings on their lawns after mowing.

While homeowners are being encouraged to leave clippings where they fall, many golf course superintendents may have little choice but to do the same. This creates a growing problem on courses where aesthetics dictate the removal of clippings. As a result, a lot of superintendents are having to look at other options for disposing of clippings.

For example, at Kankakee Country Club in Kankakee, Ill.,

clippings and not enough rough."

In contrast, at Racebrook Country Club in Orange, Conn., John Gallagher III, golf course superintendent, has been composting clippings for the past four years.

Although this solution has been feasible in Gallagher's case, many golf course superintendents cannot instigate a composting plan due to the lack of a suitable site on the course.

"Clippings are always a problem," Gallagher says. "We dispose of them in a compost pile

### Pros and cons of leaving clippings on the lawn

The following are some commonly cited benefits and disadvantages of allowing clippings to remain on the lawn:

#### Benefits

1. There is no need to collect, bag and dispose of clippings in a landfill or compost pile.
2. The process of decomposition can benefit the turf by returning nutrients to the soil.
3. It saves time and work when mowing.
4. It eliminates hauling and disposal fees.
5. Works well when grass is mowed correctly and regularly, and when proper fertility and

water management techniques are also used.

6. No special equipment is needed.

7. It saves landfill space.

#### Drawbacks

1. If you wait too long between mowings or mow at an improper height, excessive clippings can be unsightly and detrimental to a lawn.
2. In states that forbid the disposal of landscape debris in landfills, managers of high-quality turf will have to compromise the aesthetic qualities they are accustomed to in some cases by leaving the clippings in place.

Greg Coyne, golf course superintendent, is no longer able to haul away his clippings to the local landfill.

To deal with the problem, Coyne has examined the alternatives of scattering clippings in the rough or composting them. However, his disposal options are limited by the size and layout of the golf course.

"I'm not able to dispose of them in the rough because these areas are frequently in play," he says. "We have too many clip-

in a wooded, unused area away from any houses. We add soil and leaves to the clippings and use the compost for flower gardens and new tree plantings."

Gallagher adds that a remote site is important in composting because the decomposing vegetation can give off an unpleasant odor that might be offensive to players or nearby residents.

However, even if a remote area is available, some superintendents may find they generate more compost than they can

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possibly use. In fact, some cities and municipalities have started composting programs also have found little demand for composted yard waste.

In light of all these limited disposal options, some superintendents are examining the possibility of reducing the amount of clippings generated on their golf courses. This is where the use of turf growth regulators is beginning to play a role.

These products not only slow the growth of turfgrasses, they also cut down on mowing frequency and time, and help reduce the amount of clippings that need to be collected. In some cases, clippings can be left to decompose on the lawn because the reduced amount can easily deteriorate.

"Sooner or later we'll run out of space for composting," says Jim Piquette, golf course superintendent at the Firefly Golf Course in

Seekonk, Mass.

At present, Piquette disposes of clippings on the course or composts them. Therefore, for now, clippings disposal is not a problem. However, he admits that he anticipates a disposal problem in the future as space for composting becomes limited.

As he explains, "If we can reduce the clippings significantly with a growth regulator, it will be a great product regardless of what else it will do."

As a user of Cutless 50W plant growth regulator, Piquette says he has seen a 20 to 30 percent reduction in clippings.

Cutless is a foliar applied and root absorbed turf growth regulator that reduces internode elongation. Benefits of Cutless include:

- ✿ Improved turf quality and density of warm- and cool- season turfgrasses on golf course fairways, putting greens, bunkers, tees, green collars around traps

and cart paths and on hard-to-mow areas.

- ✿ Time and labor savings with hard-to-mow areas.

- ✿ It will be eventually be available for use by LCOs once application techniques are refined.

- ✿ Reduced turfgrass water use. Cutless has no adverse effects on roots and does not suppress the turf's development. It is absorbed by the plant's leaves and roots after irrigation or rainfall. □

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**PS on composting**

Grass clippings by themselves are difficult to compost because of their high water and nitrogen content. Leaf mold or straw needs to be added to fresh grass clippings to achieve the desired high carbon-to-nitrogen ratio. This will also help reduce the offensive odor associated with anaerobic decomposition.

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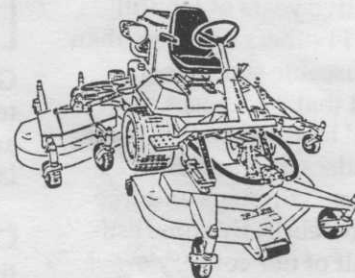
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