

Myth Busting

Are Lawns a Waste of Time and Money?

Anti-Turfgrass Statements

- 23 million acres of grass in the U.S. is too much grass!
- \$35 billion spent on lawns annually is excessive!
- Lawn care takes too much of our time; we're slaves to grass!

THE REAL GRASS FACTS

1. Turf's Place in Land-Use: Turfgrass is more than just an eye-appealing, home lawn feature. It's essential to parks and playgrounds, golf courses and sports fields and improving commercial property. It also provides these important environmental benefits: Functional—soil erosion control, dust prevention, heat dissipation, noise abatement, glare reduction, air pollution control and nuisance animal reduction; Recreational—low-cost surface, physical health, mental health, safety and spectator entertainment; Aesthetics—quality of life, social harmony, community pride, increased property values and a complement to trees, shrubs and other plants.

Reducing the total amount of turfgrass in the U.S. and elsewhere will not have a positive effect on our environment or quality of life; in fact, just the opposite is most likely.

2. Investing in Turf Care: The Lawn Institute's estimate of \$25 billion spent on lawn care includes all forms of turfgrass management and maintenance, not just home lawns. The 1995 National Gardening Association's (NGA) Gallup survey (coincidentally) reports \$25 billion spent on lawn and garden care, combined. The NGA reports that just \$166 is spent annually by those households that do take care of their lawn, which totals \$8.4 billion dollars.

3. Turf's Maintenance Requirements: Most homeowners find that mowing is the most consistent and time-consuming aspect of lawn care because only one-third apply fertilizers and pesticides, although more do water the grass. However, mowing a home lawn of 10,000 square feet, with a 19-

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Are Grass Clippings Clogging Our Landfills?

Anti-Turfgrass Statements

- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) says at least one-third of all landfill material is yard waste and most of that is grass clippings.
- 10 to 33% of the total waste stream in landfills is yard waste and grass clippings account for two-thirds of all yard waste.

THE REAL GRASS FACTS

1. "Yard Trimmings," Are More Than Grass: Based on a 1992 study, the USEPA estimates that "yard trimmings," including grass clippings, leaves, branches, brush and other plant materials, accounted for 17.9% of the total municipal solid waste, by percent of weight. Since 1960, when yard trimmings accounted for 22.8% of the total, this percentage has declined each decade, as follows: 1970 - 19.0%; 1980 - 18.2%; 1990 - 17.9%.

2. Grass Clippings Are Wet and Degrade: Most, if not all, studies of municipal solid waste are based on curb-side or landfill destination truck weights. Accordingly, 100 pounds of grass clippings weigh the same as a 100-pound refrigerator and would be considered "equal" contributors to a landfill. However, grass clippings are 90% water and the remaining 10% is very degradable, unlike the refrigerator and many other landfill components such as plastics, metals, glass, construction debris, etc. If calculated a their dry weight, grass clippings would not be more than 2% of the total landfill volume; and this volume will biodegrade very rapidly, helping to improve landfill soils and assist in degrading other organic matter.

3. "Research Bias" Can Confound Reports: A 1993 report on a study of Sacramento, California's, landfill composition reported that leaves and grass accounted for 26% of the total, leading second-place "non-recyclable paper" at 8% by a sizeable margin. However, one apparent purpose of the study was to identify potential income-generating recyclable items; and thus, different forms of paper were reported separately: non-recyclable

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inch mower, takes on average just thirty minutes. Mowing once a week for a seven-month growing season totals only eleven hours each year. Large, 60-inch commercial mowers can easily cut 30 square feet a second at even half that efficiency; and mowing 15 times a year, large areas require only one second per square foot per year!

For low maintenance, little else compares to live turfgrass.

MYTH-BUSTING CONCLUSIONS:

1. Turfgrass is a low-cost, high-return investment that improves our environment.
2. Use of turfgrass should be strongly encouraged. ■

Are Grass Clippings Clogging Our Landfills?

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paper, 8%; corrugated paper, 6.6%; mixed paper, 6.4%; newspaper, 6.3%; and office paper, 1% for a "paper" total of 35.6% — well ahead of the 26% total assigned to "leaves and grass," which we now know was calculated as a "wet" weight!

It should also be noted that the researchers made no apparent effort to distinguish high water content, rapidly decomposable grass clippings from tree leaves that most likely contain considerably less water and will take longer to decompose, depending on the variety of tree.

4. Clippings Are Too Valuable to Throw Away: Grass clippings contain an estimated 4% nitrogen that can be returned to the grass plant if they are allowed to remain on the lawn. Rather than disposing of clippings, they can be recycled in place to improve the turfgrass, save money and further reduce unfounded concerns about how they may contribute to landfill shortages.

MYTH-BUSTING CONCLUSIONS:

1. Clippings are not a major landfill concern.
2. They're too valuable to throw away. ■

* *Myth Busting articles were provided by the Turf Resource Centre. Sponsored by Turfgrass Producers International, 1855-A Hicks Road, Rolling Meadows, IL 60008.*

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