

## Landscaping for Mowing Safety

Next time you think of planting a tree or decorative bush give some thought to how your landscaping plans affect the mowing safety of your lawn. More than 80 per cent of the nearly 50 million power lawn mowers in use today are gasoline-powered walk-behind models with rotary blades—sharp knives traveling up to about 200 miles per hour. They can cut your lawn quickly and easily. They can also cause serious injury if used carelessly. So it's a good idea to plan for safer, more enjoyable mowing when landscaping your property. Chances are you can avoid creating unnecessary obstacles or hidden hazards.

For example, try to avoid mowing backward by locating your trees and shrubs strategically for a forward-only mowing pattern. Whether you have a walk-behind mower or a lawn and garden tractor, mowing forward is safer than mowing backward. When pulling a mower backward, you run risk of pulling too far, losing your balance, and perhaps running over your own toes. Backing up a lawn and garden tractor is an awkward maneuver that requires a lot of neck twisting and attention to what's behind you.

A rapidly moving blade can catch objects and hurl them at great velocity. That's why mowers manufactured and sold in recent years have been equipped with shields and deflectors. A downward-curving metal shield

(continued on page 8)

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## Mowing Safety

(Continued from page 4)

over the discharge-chute opening deflects most thrown objects to the ground a short distance away. A rubber or metal "drag" shield at the rear of the mower deck also prevents the launching of stones and sticks. These shields provide important protection, and yet some people remove them because they consider these guards a nuisance.

Sometimes people are annoyed by shields when trying to mow too close to trees or trying to mow in tight areas. When you put in new plantings, give yourself room to mow easily and safely with shields in place. And plan ahead for future growth.

Remove a small circle of grass around trees in your mowing area. This will help keep the deflector on the chute from bumping into trunks or scraping bark. This will also allow rain and nutrients to penetrate to tree roots and will let you trim right to the edge of the grass, without using hand clippers. If you prefer to cover the circle with decorative stones or chipped bark, be sure to provide a plastic or hard rubber edge strip that will keep stones and bark from spilling over into your lawn. Young children are easily tempted to throw stones or kick them around, so it may be a good idea to forego decorative stones until your children are older.

Perhaps a fence line, building foundation, or air conditioning unit presents a mowing problem. Turn your mower so the discharge chute opening faces the opposite direction and mow as close as possible with the

smooth side of the mower. Use a nylon-line trimmer to clip the remaining high grass quickly and easily. Or plant flowers or shrubs along these areas so you don't have to mow right up to them.

If you have a dangerously steep slope in your yard, it is safer to plant ground cover on it instead of trying to mow down the steep grade. When using a walk-behind mower, always mow across the face of a slope in swaths parallel to the base of the slope. Then, if you trip or lose balance, there's less chance of falling onto or slipping under the mower. With a riding model, mow up and down the slope. Riding up and down provides greater stability.

Fill in ditches and holes. You don't want a bumpy ride or, if you push a mower, you don't want to turn an ankle and fall. If a ditch can't be filled in, ground cover on the banks may be safer than maintaining grass.

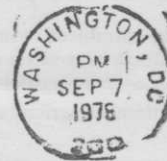
Low-hanging branches can also cause you to lose balance. In addition, they can knock you completely off a tractor seat, flick an eye, or conceal children and pets. Children under 15 are involved in about 20 per cent of the nearly 57,000 mowing mishaps that occur each year. It is always wise to make sure your youngsters are safely away from the area you are mowing.

Trees that drop nuts or hard little fruit provide another unnecessary hazard. If you already have such a tree, clean up the debris before you mow. And pick up any bones, toys, sticks, or stones. Put them in a box or bag, and cart them off before they become mower missiles.

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