



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Stormwater Pollution Prevention:

5 ways to use grass clippings to protect our water

Do not blow leaves and grass into storm drains or ditches - Dumping leaves and grass clippings into the stormwater system affects streams. The increase in nutrients associated with grass clippings can cause algae growth, which can kill fish and other aquatic life.

Keep this green waste out of storm drains. Try the following five methods instead:

1. **RETURN TO LAWN** — It is best to leave grass clippings uncollected on the lawn so that they are recycled, contributing to soil organic matter and supplying part of the fertilizer needs of the lawn. Adopt a mowing schedule to keep clippings short enough to filter through growing grass and not remain as a mat on top of the lawn. Research and experience indicate that only 1/3 of the grass length should be removed during mowing. Never allow the lawn grass to double its height between mowing. This approach not only eliminates clipping collection and disposal problems, but also can contribute to improvement of the lawn.

Clippings are not a cause of thatch in lawns. Instead, thatch is formed primarily from a dense accumulation of grass roots and stemmy material. Returning clippings along with proper mowing frequency will not increase disease problems. Use caution when removing collection bags from mowers. Some machines are not designed to operate safely without a bag or other attachment in place. Check with your equipment supplier if you are unsure if your mower can operate without a collection bag.

2. **GARDEN MULCH** — Grass clippings can be used as garden mulch. To reduce any tendency to protect slugs, clippings can be dried in the sun for a day prior to being used in this way. Clippings can be spread on garden soil to check weed growth, reduce soil spattering and crusting, moderate soil temperatures, etc. As a precaution, do not use grass clippings from herbicide treated lawns until after two grass cuttings have been made.

3. **SOIL INCORPORATION** — Clippings can serve as a source of organic matter for soil improvement when incorporated into the garden.

4. **BACKYARD COMPOSTING** — Grass clippings can be composted, especially when used in a backyard leaf composting pile. However, grass has high nitrogen content, a much higher demand for oxygen than leaves, and a tendency to mat, which reduces the passage of oxygen. Composting piles containing grass clippings can become anaerobic. This, in turn, can produce strong, unpleasant odors. These odors are particularly noticeable when the pile is disturbed. Because of these problems, grass clippings should not be composted alone, but rather mixed with composting leaves. One must be aware, however, that an excess of damp grass in the pile will soon become anaerobic, produce very unpleasant odors, and reduce the rate of

decomposition. The objective is to keep the material aerobic. Also, to ensure that excess nitrogen is not given off as ammonia, do not add more than 1 part fresh grass clippings to 3 parts partially composted leaves. The resulting compost can be used as a soil amendment, as mulch for gardens, flower or shrub beds, or as a potting medium.